



Plenary Report 23 January 2011: A Step Closer to Equality

Report on conference outcomes by Teopista Birungi, Executive Board Africa

Outcomes from 2 Plenary Sessions (Days One and Two)

- Budget cuts induced by the recent financial crisis have had a negative impact on the provision of quality public services. Hence there has been a setback on the promotion of gender equality provisions. Strong advocacy is needed for maintaining appropriate funding resources.
- There is a need to reduce gaps between policy and practice by strengthening links between global policy agreements and national/local implementation and practice as well as by providing synergy between experience and policy.
- We must strengthen the power to organize, particularly in recruiting younger women by strategizing around issues (health, maternity, child care) that are pertinent to their lives and interests and that meet their immediate needs.
- Political and public space must be secured for women, not only by electing women in leadership positions in politics or in decision making positions but by cooperating with them to pursue the gender equality agenda.
- There is a need to advocate for media legislation on gender responsive portrayal of women, not as an object of pleasure but as an active and productive contributor to society and community.
- We need to fight for ratification of ILO Gender Equality Conventions and advocate implementation at national levels.
- Gender Equality Committees within trade unions should have more political leverage and generate more positive results by allocating them more power and resources.
- Attitudes that are ingrained and passed on to the next generation can be transformed by providing gender training to both male and female school teachers on gender values, gender knowledge on gender roles and dynamics that could help them change their mindsets and enhance their understanding of gender dimensions in education. Unless teachers are made aware of gender issues, their teaching and interactions with students could suffer from lack of gender sensitivity.
- Gender budgeting needs to be seriously practiced within trade unions.

- Collective advocacy is needed on how to be more inclusive of ethnic and indigenous communities and consider their specific needs and interests.



- Economic empowerment is crucial for advancement of women. Decent jobs should be made a reality for women teachers with appropriate salary, decent conditions of work and high level of motivation.
- Issues of child labour and sexual exploitation through trafficking are issues that have been countered by provision of skill training and diversified economic opportunities. More efforts are required in this direction, both for awareness raising and for dealing with the “clients” of sex workers.
- Right to education is a human right but focusing only on right to education is not enough. We need to recognize the indivisibility of human rights and rights to health, work and appropriate environment must be considered as equally important to support the importance and operationalization of right to education.
- Partnerships and collective efforts play a critical role. Strategic influences both on the community and on state can be enhanced by working together through multiple partners in civil society.
- We need to fight against stereotypes in all areas: curriculum, policy, text books and other discriminatory practices because they augment negative effects through discrimination. A supportive environment for girls together with a variety of creative and innovative strategies could be used to remove such stereotypes.
- Involvement of boys and men in gender equality campaigns would bring about equality results more effectively. Under achievement among boys is an equally important issue and should be addressed by using a two pronged approach of gender mainstreaming which includes gender specific interventions where needed, as a valid component of gender mainstreaming efforts.
- There should be no room for complacency, in fact, we should have zero tolerance to all forms of violence, harassment and sexual exploitation of girl children at school.
- There is a need to emphasize the political dimensions within a trade union and the networks; we must have linkages creating synergy in a particular direction; otherwise it will be chaos.
- Quality education is only possible if we provide decent working conditions for teachers on one hand, job creation for the qualified on the other and enable trade unions to include such demands within the collective bargaining systems.
- We are still on the move for equality. As trade unionists we have a critical role to play and for this we have to hold on to each other and work together in solidarity.
- We need to monitor compliance of gender equality in educational sectors. Gender audit is a new practical instrument that could help in gender assessments.
- We must train the next generation of teachers for the next generation of students. We must recognize the essential role of teachers in educational environment and the advancement of both women and men. Ensure that there are enough teachers and that teachers enjoy good status, stable and fair salaries and be valued as resources. 2005 goal in education was missed ... ensure to do better by 2015.



Comments from Respondents

Milagros Ogalinda, Asia-Pacific Regional Committee

Milagros Ogalinda commended EI for the amazing job undertaken to bring together opinions from different cultures, different regions and different perspectives. Despite differences, there are many grounds for sharing commonalities. The discussion so far has given us a clear picture of where we are right now and what must be done further. There are three types of women, those who are asleep, those who are awake and those who are snoring. We are awake, responsible and accountable. Our toes have been turned towards the goals but more toes to turn towards EI. We must move united towards a specific direction – put ideas into concrete action. Women must take the lead building upon a strong foundation through training and knowledge.

Gloria Inés Ramírez, Senate of the Republic of Colombia

Gloria Inés Ramírez expressed her conviction that cultural processes can be changed through collective action. **The trade unions for women's movement should come together and fight to make rights a reality. It is very important to work on women's rights, irrespective of human rights.** Poverty is the most important social phenomenon that affects human rights. Political participation is affected by poverty. It is a determining factor in the exercise of our rights. Hence, we must strive very hard against poverty, especially in times of crisis. Public policies must be generated in a non-religious environment. **She commended the work of the Asia Pacific Network and added that success in institutionalizing such networks will lead further to promote training policies for women to develop their capabilities further and create another world of gender equality. EI will make this another world possible. But unions need proper budget to help this kind of work.**

Loretta Johnson, AFT Executive Vice President

Loretta Johnson emphasized that **unions must become more task focused and support networks to collaborate on issues such as pay equity. All EI members must integrate gender issues into all their work. EI must be more cognitive of cross cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, pension and other benefits issues, teacher migration, etc., and disseminate all research reports and publications. This Conference report should be made available soon and all recommendations must be changed to resolutions in the Cape Town Congress. Budget allocations must be increased. This Conference has provided a unique opportunity to discuss various challenges such as gender based violence, pay equity, declining respect for teachers. Now, we must harness our energies and carry on the momentum by moving into concrete action.**



Plenary Discussion of outcomes, results, alliances, key events, actions and processes

There were 36 comments/ suggestions from the floor

Four insights: There is a strong relationship between politics and economy. **If trade union leaders are in power, all policies will consider the welfare of teachers and gender equality issues in the education sector.** Alliances are important to be pursued with different sectors of society: labourers, urban force, etc. The functions of a university are to arouse, organize and mobilize (AOM). All recommendations must always turn into action.

The great challenge now is how to impact the EI Congress in Cape Town since there is time only till 15 of February for submission of proposals by national organizations; and how to ensure that resolutions are adopted. States have to invest in education to bring about gender equality. **Unions have a responsibility to make an impact on public policy. Networks must be active to fight for inclusion of gender equality issues in all government documents. The working sector must be present at the UN level.**

Protection of health and eradication of poverty are absolutely needed if quality education is to be achieved. Financial cuts in spending in education and health are not at all helpful; we need to wage battle to demand for more investment in these sectors.

If all resolutions are implemented, we can hope for equality to be achieved sooner.

Budget cuts are a world-wide issue. We must call on EI Congress to defend basic right to quality education and emphasize the need for resources and more investments. This Conference must stand up for Equality, Free Quality Education and redistribution of wealth.

In the preliminary report on the outcomes of this conference, the situation of indigenous girls and women teachers is missing. These should be definitely included. EI should organize conferences like this to provide psychological stimulation and energy to its member organizations. This has proved to be a great platform to feel solidarity and find common issues.

Common issues have been identified in this prestigious EI Conference. **We would like to recommend formations of Task Forces to carry on the gender work forward and to report to conferences like this. We suggest that if Task Forces could be identified from various regions, they could be given the responsibility to reporting to future EI conferences.**

Speaking for the European region, EI needs to point out to the governments and decision makers how many countries have been affected adversely by the financial crisis. There has been severe impact on both teachers and pupils. **EI needs to challenge their current policies and fight for a gender equality policy in public education.**



This Conference has helped to create new links and new perspectives on leadership. Politics and education are closely linked. The situation of women in leadership has changed in the Caribbean. Now, 50 percent of leaders in trade unions are women and they have managed to remain at the top. We need women to lead also as visionaries and continue lobbying till we achieve our goals.

Concerns and issues are similar throughout the world. WE need written documents detailing the issues so that we can focus and have a unified course of action. To be effective, we must ass some action. Let us walk the talk. When will we receive the documentation of the report in full? Make sure to post all presentations and outcomes on the website before the report is published.

Since 1996, the SAARC region has gradually moved into the equality themes. **We greatly appreciate the workshop on “Gender Audit” – it is a new instrument and can be used as an effective tool for gender equality promotion in all our unions.** We hope history will soon be her story.

There is a decline in government funding for higher education. The expectation was that higher education will be commercialized but this has led to marginalization and decline in quality of education. It is also harder to get funding for research because it is a feminized sector in terms of more women engaged in this field. EI should address both these issues.

Two gaps that have not been focused much are (i) early childhood education which is a critical part of education during which all future patterns will be formed and seated and also affords a really good opportunity to work with both father and mother of the child; (ii) indigenous communities in their fight against mainstream hegemony.

Laws and legislation are not enough to bring about transformation in attitudes towards gender equality. We need to strive for change in the mentality of people, turn their mind sets in favour of gender equality.

We look forward to the Global Network coming through and becoming a reality.

We have learnt a lot about gender equality in physical education but what strategies can we adopt at national and global levels to bring this about? **We recommend that the trade unions impose a quota of at least two women attending the Cape Town Congress. We should have more men in future attending EI Global Conference on Women**

We should have a monitoring mechanism for the implementation of our recommendations.

There should be more campaigns to conduct gender audits of all our institutions.

We are inspired!!! Let us disseminate the information as soon as possible to women “out there”.

Without good health, education is not meaningful. There are serious health issues among teachers – non-communicable diseases among female teachers. **EI should establish linkages with WHO, concentrate on health issues and help non-reduction of productive hours.**



I was able to attend this Conference because of the encouragement I received from the late union leader Hasim. This has given me a chance to reflect on my situation. Now I plan to run for election in the union, where women have been restricted in their participation by men. I request EI's assistance in helping me to encourage more women to run for next election.

Access to education is a major component of social justice. Public education is a must for both developing and developed countries. **EI must look into the matter of national spending on public expenditure when the whole nation is in debt.**

We hope that this Conference will be institutionalized in the Cape Town Congress. Gender mainstreaming should permeate all public and education policies. We need to be making advances not only in networks but in all EI structures. We should strengthen our influence on political narratives and also on what the academicians are saying. Concern over under achievement of boys is an issue of power race. It has more to do with lack of importance given to education. There is a need to cultivate more democratic societies. Our conclusions need to be clear and our action plans need to be courageous, particularly when it comes to fighting against trafficking and child labour.

This has been the best conference and a fantastic event. We congratulate President Susan Hopgood for this pioneering efforts. We must ensure that young women have choices open and continue working against discrimination, direct abuse, systemic abuse and scorns.

The approach taken by this conference of appropriate inclusiveness is highly appreciated. Men have an equal, if not more important role in promoting gender equality. Just as racism is a concern of us all, gender equality is also our joint concern. Liberating half the human race is the concern of us all, to create a better world for our sons and daughters.

Monitoring should constitute our home-work. Gender audit could be of great help to us on monitoring our gender work in the unions. The workshop on gender audit was very useful; unfortunately due to lack of time we could not practice on the exercises.

We need to involve young women in our struggle for equality. As EI, we also need to have holistic sexual training. It is astounding how HIV/AIDS has affected such a large segment of people everywhere. We thank Jan Eastman for all the work carried out for this conference.

Experience and ideas sharing have been very fruitful but the real issues are not solved yet. We must strive to make a difference through EI. There should be a world campaign for zero illiteracy, because being literate means becoming integrated in the world. Unions have been hardest hit by the present financial crisis but we have to be more resistant to illiberal policies and those not complying with ILO Conventions should be punished.

What more can we do, together? What more can I do as a woman? What more can you do as a man? **EI should make the report useful and inspire women to action and take on more challenges. Also there should be a better linking of websites.**



We want to be involved politically. For this we need guidance from EI. How far can we take our involvement in politics?

One point that needs more focus is if we want to ensure gender equality and fight for equal pay, we need a less segregated labour market. Both boys and girls should take up non-traditional sectors of occupation.

The struggle for equality is definitely a part of the struggle for freedom. We feel stronger, inspired and much more motivated than when we first came. Workshops are diverse, giving us opportunity to identify methods and tools. Unity can achieve the impossible. In Lebanon, women unionists have been demonstrating in order to help against religious discrimination about Muslim women being required to wear hijab in public places. **EI should provide Arabic interpreters in future conferences.**

We, women in Transitional Countries are losing much of our equality positions. Xenophobia is growing. Pay gap between women and men's salaries is increasing. Women are being paid lower with lesser benefits. This conference has been important to induce a sense of solidarity and understanding of global situation. We have to be together. This is the message to take home.

We appreciate the inclusiveness. Not all unions have the same level playing field. There are countries emerging from war, from natural disasters. **Our appeal to EI is to continue the good work from north to south and make sure that both men and women have competencies to move gender equality forward.**

Closing remarks by Susan Hopgood, President: A Step Closer to Equality

Susan Hopgood reflected that this journey for gender equality since 1993 has been full of challenges. Women representation in EI bodies has been enshrined in the Constitution, the Women's Committee and Caucuses have been enshrined in EI policies. But these have not come by easily. EI has grown in numbers, policies and political support. It has taken two steps forward and one step backward. It is more important to consider what has been actually achieved. Instituting Women's Network is a critical factor. Some have seen it as a threat. The Pre-Conference meetings have given all an opportunity to analyze regional priorities. A review of the three days' meetings and the outcomes shows that EI can now move forward in developing strategies and moving forward. **"Have we succeeded?" Susan asked and replied herself, "We have exceeded." She assured the delegates that the report and its conclusions will definitely be taken as the basis for future action and that now EI has the policy but action based strategies have yet to be formulated.** Then she declared the Conference closed.