

ITUC — EI — PSI

Joint Statement
UN CSW 51st session
New York
March 2007



International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

is the main global union organization of over 168 million workers, through 304 affiliated members in 153 countries and territories



Education International (EI)

is a global union federation of unions representing 30 million teachers and education workers, through 384 affiliated members in 169 countries and territories



Public Service International (PSI)

is a global union federation of over 650 unions of workers in public sector in over 150 countries and territories

Over 50 million women from 160 countries belong to trade unions, making the union movement the single largest voice of working women. Unions have a global reach, members working in all types of jobs, from professionals to low-skilled workers and in the informal economy.

This year we wish to express our concerns on the situation of girls in developing countries, forced into work because of family poverty, particularly women's poverty; and because of lack of access to essential public services, notably quality education and water.



Girls and Child Labour

According to the ILO¹ there were 218 million child labourers in 2006, although the figures for girl child labourers could well indeed be under-estimated as girl's work is often hidden, unvalued and uncounted. Their work, in the form of domestic work, agricultural work and home-based work and including clandestine work, such as forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation, is not sufficiently captured by available statistics.

Girls' labour, official and unofficial, continues to constitute a major obstacle to accelerating progress towards achieving the goal of education for all by 2015. Girls make up 60 of the 100 million children not attending school around the world today. Since the majority of out-of-school girls are likely to be working, efforts to increase girls' education must go hand-in-hand with efforts to eliminate child labour, in a broad preventative approach

The Girl Child and Education

Poverty, social prejudice, lack of identity papers, child labour and a

host of other factors prevent an estimated 41 million girls (53%) from completing primary education. Additionally, more than 542 million women are illiterate (64%), many as a result of inadequate or incomplete schooling (UNESCO 2006), which does not help the girl child, as we know that a literate mother aids her children in many ways.

The World Conference on Education for All (Dakar, 2000) set up an affordable and achievable goal "all children to complete a primary education by 2015", and it declared "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources". There are many challenges, including those of a resources nature, especially perhaps a looming shortage of qualified teachers.

The real challenge is not only getting girls to school but keeping them there. This depends on safe travelling from home to school, on a non-violent culture within the schools, a gender sensitive curriculum and teaching attitude designed to encourage girls. Health education and life-skills need to be a focus of a respectful and inclusive school environment.

Any form of violence that diminishes a child's rights to education is a violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 19, 28, 29, 34, 37).

Quality Public Education

The Millennium Development Goal for gender parity in education was not achieved by 2005 as promised. Education not only provides basic knowledge and skills to improve health and livelihood, it also empowers women to take their rightful place in society and the development process, in both economic and social terms. Education saves lives by giving women the confidence and power to make better choices for themselves and their children. Without education, the cycle of poverty is perpetuated.

Unions remind governments of UN member states of their international human rights promises and obligations, including economic, social and cultural rights. In particular, the delivery of education should comply with the Dakar Framework of Action, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights Declaration, the Minimum Age Convention (C 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C 182).

The international trade union movement is committed to advocating strongly for quality universal public services, in particular education that is free, universally accessible, compulsory, child friendly, relevant, and includes secondary as well as primary, at least up to the minimum age to work.

¹ Global Report on Child Labour, "The end of Child Labour: within reach" ILO International Labour Conference, July 2006



Water pump, Chad. Photo: Karin Strom, ST Sweden

Lack of access to water and its impact on the girl child

Access to water is fundamental if we are to reduce poverty, improve reproductive and maternal health and improve the situation of the girl child in developing countries. Every year, 3 million people, most of them children, die from preventable diseases, associated with contaminated water. Millions more suffer from water-related diseases. There is a clear interdependency between the right to water and other social, economic and cultural rights. Access to water is essential in order to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals.

Fetching water- a full-time job

Girls and women are primarily responsible for fetching water in developing countries. In South Africa, it is calculated that girls and women spend more than 40 million hours per year fetching water. Girls and women can walk up to 8 hours per day, travelling up to 15 kilometres during the dry season, to fetch water for their family. This is precious time that girls do not spend at school or at play.

Lack of water and sanitation facilities at schools

About 1 in 10 school-age girls in Sub-Saharan Africa will not attend school during menstruation or will drop out of school at puberty because of the absence of clean and private sanitation facilities. According to the UNDP, for example, in Uganda, only 8% of schools have sufficient latrines and just one-third have separate latrines for girls. Studies show that women's educational levels are related to their hygiene practices, which depend in turn on access to water and sanitation. Moreover, access to water reduces the risks of health hazards and exposure to potential abuse and violence.

Quality Public Water

According to the World Health Organisation, in order to meet the water MDG target, of reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water, an additional 260,00 people per day up to 2015 need to gain access to improved water sources. The UN estimates that an extra investment of USD 11.3 billion per year for the next 10 years is needed to reach that goal.

The international trade union movement is committed to supporting the human right to water, as adopted in the statement by UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2002, which claims *"the human rights to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use."*

The social, economic and environmental cost of failing to provide water and sanitation are far greater than the resources needed to provide for these fundamental needs. Among other issues, the trade union movement calls for:

1. Renewed government commitment to funding infrastructure development to provide water and sanitation to meet the MDG target of reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water;
2. No one should be deprived of access to safe water because they lack the ability to pay. Water utilities, private or public, must operate a social tariff policy.
3. Water services must retain the character of a public service
4. Public authorities have an essential role in quality standard setting, regulation and enforcement. Trade unions and civil society organisations, in particular women's groups, should be involved in setting these standards.
5. Responsible water management can only be achieved with the involvement of trade unions and all stakeholders, in particular women.

Quality education means children being taught by a caring qualified teacher, in classes of a reasonable size, with multiple texts and learning resources and proper classroom. Making schools safer, a safe place for girls to learn is essential to increasing girls' enrolment, but keeping girls at school requires a combination of comprehensive measures. These include among others:

1. Ensuring safety and respect for their basic rights and dignity of girls in school, at home and in society as a whole;
2. Allocating more resources for pre-service and in-service training for teachers and health workers to fully prepare them on how to deal with new challenges: violence, health and sex education, among others;
3. Ensuring quality public services, including education, require gender-sensitive use of human resources, and consideration of gender in the budget allocation.
4. Ensuring gender-sensitive and relevant educational curricula and resources.
5. Allocate resources for establishing in-school structures to provide support for both students and teachers, and greater involvement of the community in preventing violence.

Women and trade unions

Women gain from union membership

Women who work in unionised workplaces earn up to a third more than women who do not. Union members are more likely to have a permanent contract of employment, to benefit from maternity pay and protection, have carers' leave and pension rights. This bodes well for their children.

In most countries, large numbers of women work in the public services. Historically, the public sector has had a strong trade union organization, especially in health and education. However, privatisation, the free market and deregulation are undermining the traditional collective bargaining relationship. Women suffer most from the impact of free market economic policies. Because of subcontracting and out-sourcing of services, many women no longer benefit from negotiated conditions

of employment. One of the biggest challenges facing trade unions is how to organise effectively women and men who no longer have a clear employment relationship with their employer.

The informal economy

Unions and rights based NGOs are working to extend labour and social protection to workers in the informal economy, the majority of whom are women. National unions are either organising informal economy workers or supporting their self-organisation.

Trade unions role in society

Unions recognise that work place rights cannot be separated from wider social and economic justice issues. Among many, these include poverty eradication, debt relief and cancellation, and the impact

of trade agreements on sustainable development, and the right to water and health. They also include the full range of equality and diversity issues, including gender based violence, discrimination on grounds of race, national identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, and religion.

Unions have a distinctive contribution to global and national alliances because of their direct link to workers and the issues that concern them. Unions and women's organisations working together can give effective voice to the issues that are important to women's lives and find new ways to support women who enter paid work that is informal, insecure and often exploitative.

The international union movement is strongly committed to supporting the full implementation of CEDAW, it's Optional Protocol and the strategic objectives of Beijing Platform of Action.



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