

From the Classroom to the Workplace

– Positioning Women
for Decent Work in the
Knowledge Economy



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Background
Discussion Paper
prepared jointly by

Education International (EI),
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC),
and Public Services International (PSI)

for the 55th session of the United Nations Commission on
the Status of Women (UN CSW55, New York, 22 February –
4 March, 2011) under Item 3 (a) (i) of the Agenda:

Priority theme - access and participation of
women and girls to education, training,
science and technology, including for the
promotion of women's equal access
to full employment and decent
work

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NOTE: A shorter version of this document has been received by the United Nations Secretary-General, and will be posted as the official Statement of EI-ITUC-PSI to CSW55. Available in all UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), this Statement will appear in the NGO Statements section of the UNCSW website. The web link is: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw55/documentation.htm>

The Statement is also available in English, French, and Spanish on the ITUC, EI and PSI websites (see back cover).

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Introduction

Defining the Broad Context of Gender and Development

All countries of the world today are faced with the challenge of achieving sustainable economic growth in a globalizing world where technological and scientific knowledge are key to progress. But given global and national inequities, they are inevitably approaching the challenges from very different starting points. In particular, in many countries, persistent gender inequalities in educational systems, in the school to work transition, and in working life need to be addressed. It is for this reason that the global trade union movement, represented at the CSW by EI, ITUC and PSI, is pleased to participate in the critical policy dialogue before CSW55, focusing on the linkages between education and training, including in science and technology (S&T), and the world of work.

Investment in all quality public services is a key driver of development. As such, trade unions have grave concerns with the reductions to budgets supporting public services which governments have undertaken in response to the current economic

crisis. These cuts are having a negative impact on the provision of quality public services which are central to eradicating poverty through the delivery of health care, education, and decent work for women. Investments in the public sector and in the social ministries charged with development, labour and gender equality should be increased not decreased in a time of crisis, if the Millennium Development (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals are to be achieved.

Given the importance of poverty eradication and sustainable development, broadly defined, for economic and social progress, trade unions take the view that the topic of S&T for women's employment, needs to be analysed in the broader context of the structured inequalities that deny women in different countries and economic sectors the opportunity to participate fully in and benefit from economic life. It should be recognized that the education of girls is of critical importance for the development of societies. The evidence base shows clearly that exclusions

and discriminations begin early, often in the classroom or through denial of access to it. They are then perpetuated and exacerbated along the continuum from school to working life. Multiple dimensions compounding gender discrimination include economic status, geographic location, lack of access to quality public services, ethnicity and disability.

In many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, children are failing to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills at the end of their primary school years. These countries are falling short of EFA and MDG targets relative to girls graduating from primary school. Admittedly, strategies to improve access to education have been put in place. These have resulted in increased enrolment numbers for girls, and progress towards gender parity in primary school completion. High drop-out rates are still prevalent, however, and they are higher for girls in a number of developing countries. Only 60 per cent of all children in sub-Saharan Africa complete primary school, with girls

further behind than boys, showing a 55 per cent figure for primary school completion. We must look closely at the complex interlinking factors behind the high drop-out rates, including the quality of education, the safety of the learning environment. It has been suggested, for example, that part of that differential

can be explained by user fees. Where these are in place, parents are more motivated to spend their limited resources on their sons' education rather than on their daughters', since, in their view, this latter investment will be reaped, not by them, but by their in-laws.



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Female literacy

While there has been growth in female literacy rates in many regions, adult literacy data for 1985 to 2005 show that gender disparities continue to exist. Disparities are greatest in the Arab States, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Despite this, growth has been most substantial in South and West Asia, where the proportion of female adult literates has increased by almost 20 percentage points between 1985 and 2005. That being said, it should be noted that still over 500 million women remain illiterate today.

UNESCO UIS Infosheet No. 4, 2009

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Laying the Foundation for Gender-Inclusive Approaches at all Educational Levels

Drop-out rates are clearly associated with poverty, and also the related phenomenon of child labour, where girls are severely affected. In India, for example, 96 per cent of child labourers live in households where per capita income is less than USD \$2 per day, and young girls account for 42 per cent of all children in employment. Girls face additional challenges of vulnerable, at risk employment in the entertainment industry where they are victims of trafficking, or as domestic workers, where the majority of girls trapped in abusive child labour are to be found. Structured discriminations also affect the girl child in rural areas, given that some 70 per cent of poor women live in rural areas and are engaged in low wage employment as own account workers or as workers on family farms, or in the informal economy. They can ill afford to keep their children at school, and once again prefer to use the girl child as family help.

Despite commendable progress in developing education systems and

addressing gender disparities in line with MDG and EFA goals, the foregoing analysis shows that severe development challenges still need to be overcome. Addressing them in an adequate manner is critical for laying the foundation for progress with gender-inclusive education at all levels, including in S&T. In addition, where satisfactory progress in S&T is being made, gender disparities persist, and need to be addressed.

In some regions and countries, (Latin America, the Caribbean, North Africa), girls and young women are showing good academic performance in S&T at the secondary and tertiary levels, even outperforming boys and young men. However, statistics indicate that girls and women show a preference for the life sciences (medicine, biology, biochemistry), rather than for physics, engineering and computer sciences. A number of factors contribute to these choices: gender stereotyping of so-called male and female career paths, which is often reflected in

teaching materials; a lack of support for programmes to tackle the gender stereotyping and segregation in education; and the lack of female role models for girls, both with respect to teachers of science and technology at all levels of education, as well as women who have pursued professional or managerial careers in the area of science and technology.

Academic Achievement and Professional Advancement in S&T – A Mismatch

Where girls gain access, they achieve. Clearly, increasing numbers of women are completing university level programmes in S&T and engineering, but this is not being translated to equal career chances and salaries. After initial entry into S&T fields, opportunities for career advancement are minimal, and retention is poor. A high level of vertical segregation has been noted, with women concentrated in the lower echelons of the occupational ladder, facing barriers that hinder advancement to senior research and managerial positions or professorships. Attrition rates for girls and women have been noted across the school to work continuum in S&T fields, but are particularly marked in the university to work transition. There is clearly a mismatch between educational attainments for women on the one hand, and career advancement and job remuneration on the other, as compared with men; and pay inequity is also persistent.

The high attrition rates noted, have been attributed to the

fact that both classroom and work environments in the S&T field are hostile to women, while they reward men's performance. Gender stereotypes about these being "masculine territory" help to sustain the gender unfriendliness with regard to women's pursuit of careers in these fields. In the scientific environment, the prevailing ethos rewards long hours of commitment to professional endeavours and publications. Without the necessary policies in place to encourage an equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, this represents a further barrier for women who must then combine professional with family responsibilities. Not only are women's roles in social reproduction and the care economy not recognized, women are actually penalized for their efforts to balance these roles with professional careers in the S&T field.

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From the Classroom to the Decent Workplace

– A Holistic Approach

Denying women opportunities for full participation in the S&T fields results in the loss of a valuable resource pool, much needed for contributing to the shaping of a gender-inclusive, people-centred, knowledge economy; and it is a denial of women's fundamental rights. To be sustainable, policies that address this sphere of gender inequality must operate within a holistic policy framework geared to tackling the full range of development challenges and structured inequalities that impede the smooth transition from the classroom to the decent workplace.

Achieving quality education is key. Policies for quality education need to be

formulated along three major axes, and in a gender-inclusive way:

- *Improving the educational curriculum and methodologies to make them relevant to the achievement of quality education for all, lifelong learning, and the world of work; ensuring an adequate supply of textbooks and materials; removing embedded gender stereotypes; organising gender-sensitive training for teachers;*
- *Improving the physical and material environment in terms of user-friendly buildings which ensure they are safe spaces for girls, including sanitary facilities; ensuring an adequate supply of technical*

and IT equipment, and making them accessible and attractive to girls;

- *Improving the cadre of teachers in quantity and quality through adequate recruitment, induction, and retention strategies, including pre and in-service training, opportunities for professional development and advancement, adequate remuneration; removing pay inequity.*

Moreover, there is a need for policies, programs and campaigns geared to raising awareness and combating negative stereotypes, and encouraging girls to embark on all fields of study, including science and technology.

Decent Work

As stated in the ILO's 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, Decent Work encompasses four strategic objectives: employment, social protection, social dialogue and tripartism, and fundamental principles and rights at work. In its efforts to achieve gender equality, the ILO has adopted a holistic approach, to ensure that gender equality is cross-cutting through all four objectives.

Source: ILO Resolution 2009 concerning Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work – para 13.



Creating an Enabling Environment in Support of Women's Access to Full Employment and Decent Work

Decent Work Strategic Objective I – Employment

Gender sensitive employment policies are critical to overcoming the decent work deficit, to addressing issues of feminized poverty, particularly in the informal economy, pay inequity, occupational segregation, exploitative conditions of work, precarious work, equal access to opportunities for education and skills development.

Source: ILO Resolution 2009 concerning Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work – paras 14, 16 and 17.

Access to quality public services, whether in health and social care, water and sanitation, electricity and fuel, public administration, vocational training and further education, is fundamental to women's access to full employment and decent work. An unequal distribution of household and care responsibilities between women and men continues to limit women's full participation in labour markets and in decent work that is permanent, and secure. Gender segregation further limits women's full participation in labour markets. Women – and in particular young women – are especially vulnerable to 'precarious' employment that is temporary or casual, is generally low-paid, with little or no social protection. Policy measures aimed at ensuring women's access to full employment and decent work must address these prevailing decent work deficits.



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Conclusions

– Applying a Comprehensive Policy and Normative Framework

The policy and normative framework exists to underpin such an enabling environment so it delivers on real gender equality. It must now be applied. The framework consists notably of:

- ***The Beijing Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.***
- ***Key ILO Conventions: the Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No 111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No 183).***

Decent Work Strategic Objective 2 – Social protection

The ILO strongly recommends the establishment, at national level, of sustainable, tax-based models of universal social security that are gender sensitive, and that provide citizens with key services such as quality health care, unemployment benefits, maternity protection, and a basic income. Legislative provisions and labour policies must also include occupational health and safety measures, affordable child care, and dependent care, as well as cash transfers and employment guarantee schemes, as measures to combat poverty, ensuring women's full access to all services and benefits. Key to fair inclusive access is the application of ILO Convention 156 on Family Responsibilities.

Source: ILO Resolution 2009 concerning Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work – paras 25, 26 and 28.

EI, -ITUC and PSI call on Member States at the CSW55 to introduce and strengthen policy interventions within this policy and normative framework, geared to overcoming the structured discriminations and barriers affecting the life chances of girls and women in terms of adequate education and training that prepare them and enhance their opportunities for full and productive employment and decent work.

It is also important that policy-makers establish consultative processes that allow for social dialogue with trade unions who, from their experience, can contribute greatly to the policy-making process that boosts the important nexus between education and training, and decent work.



Decent Work Strategic Objective 3 – Social Dialogue

Social Dialogue and tripartism are essential policy tools to advance gender equality. They involve government, employers, and workers' representatives coming together, and engaging in dialogue towards the establishment and implementation of non-discriminatory legislation and gender equality policies and measures. Collective bargaining is a key means of determining adequate terms and conditions at work-place level. Collective bargaining must incorporate key gender equality objectives such as overcoming the pay gap, providing childcare, removing violence and harassment from the workplace, and instituting work/family measures. Tripartite consultative bodies must be established or strengthened, with a view to institutionalizing dialogue on gender issues with the social partners (governments, workers and employers), and with the parties to the negotiation of collective agreements. All of these actors should be trained on how to incorporate gender equality provisions into policies and collective agreements. Affirmative action measures should be put in place to ensure the full participation of women trade unionists, both in social dialogue, and in the collective bargaining process.

Source: ILO Resolution 2009 concerning Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work – paras 36 and 37.

Collective bargaining should be used as a key instrument to promote gender equality outcomes such as pay equity, equal opportunity for professional advancement, maternity protection and the equal sharing of family responsibilities, as enshrined in the ILO Conventions cited above.

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Decent Work

Strategic Objective 4

– Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

International labour standards are a primary means to promote equality in the world of work. Key Conventions in this regard are the *Equal Remuneration Convention*, 1951 (No. 100), and the *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention*, 1958 (No. 111). These need to be ratified, implemented and monitored by all member States. In addition, the *Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention*, 1981 (No. 156), and the *Maternity Protection Convention*, 2000 (No. 183), call on States to provide policy guidance and practical means for reconciling work and family responsibilities, and for protecting pregnant workers. Respect for these Conventions, backed up by appropriate policies, is of critical importance for achieving gender equality. Finally, two fundamental Conventions are of particular relevance to gender equality, the *Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention*, 1948 (No.87), and the *Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention*, 1949 (No. 98), which contain enabling rights to pursue gender equality. The application of these two Conventions is particularly important for the realization of all other rights, including the human rights of women.

Source: ILO Resolution 2009 concerning Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work – paras 29, 30 and 34.

Trade unions empower working women

Unions play a crucial role in organising women, negotiating better working conditions, and providing women with fair access to decent jobs. Labour representation gives working women the power to advance their rights both in the workplace and society. Trade union organizations work to ensure that women's rights are protected and respected at all levels, and supported by legislation. This includes promoting women as leaders and decision-makers at all levels within their unions, regional bodies, and international institutions, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW).

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work set out principles designed to ensure that

women are not discriminated against in their workplaces, and that they have the right to join trade unions and engage in collective bargaining.

Given the current need to monitor and address the impacts of the economic crisis on women, two further policy instruments, adopted by the ILO at its 98th International Labour Conference in June 2009 are of special significance. These are: the ILO Global Jobs Pact and the ILO Resolution concerning Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work.

Many women work in the informal economy without legal protection. Trade union federations and confederations are working to have labour legislation applied to the informal economy, to formally recognize the rights of these vulnerable workers and to provide social security coverage for them.

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Education International (EI)

is a global union federation of unions representing 30 million teachers and education workers, through affiliates in 172 countries and territories. EI stands up for quality public services, most especially the right to quality public education for all, particularly girls in deprived areas. Ensuring that teachers are qualified and schools are safe for children and teachers guarantee the provision of quality education. EI's First World Women's Conference On the Move for Equality took place in January 2011, in Thailand, with a focus on achieving gender equality in education, unions and society.

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Public Services International (PSI)

is a global union federation representing more than 20 million women and men working primarily in public services across the globe. Two-thirds of our members are women, many of whom work in the health and social care sectors. PSI believes in affirmative action to achieve gender equality and promotes a "50/50 policy" amongst our affiliates, encouraging equal participation in leadership between women and men. PSI campaigns for the strong, quality public services that are key to empowering women, and advocates on specific issues including the need for pay equity, maternity protection, and an end to violence against women.

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International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

is the overall global union organization representing over 168 million workers, through affiliated members in 155 countries and territories. At the first ITUC World Women's Conference in October 2009, delegates expressed deep concern at the negative impacts of the global economic crisis on women, and affirmed that the commitment to advancing gender equality must not be eroded by the crisis. Strong support was given to the recently adopted International Labour Conference resolution on gender equality at the heart of decent work, which emphasizes that "crises should not be used as excuses to create even greater inequalities nor undermine women's acquired rights".