

Commission on the Status of Women Fifty-fourth session 1-12 March 2010 Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda E/CN.6/2010/1 : Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement submitted by Education International (EI), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and Public Services International (PSI), non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Women in the Global Economy in a Time of Crisis

Introduction – Impacts on Women of Multiple Crises

The 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW54) in 2010 provides an invaluable opportunity to assess progress made and remaining challenges in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action fifteen years after its adoption in 1995.

For the global trade union movement which will be represented at the CSW by EI, the ITUC and PSI, there is hardly cause for celebration. We express our deep concern at the plight of millions of working women caught up in a set of global and multiple crises that are not of their making, and that nevertheless are affecting their chances to live decent lives in dignity, equity and freedom from poverty. After being hit by the food and energy crises in the spring of 2008, they have been suffering the impacts of the financial crisis which peaked in September of 2008, precipitating a veritable jobs crisis, while the ongoing climate crisis slowly takes its toll.

These multiple food, financial, jobs and climate crises have wiped out a good portion of the gains made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with disproportionately negative impacts in increasing women's poverty and food insecurity, and limiting their access to decent jobs, affordable, quality education, health and reproductive services, water and other basic social services. These crises have clearly undermined national policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities and equities.

The Jobs, Food and Climate Dimensions of the Crisis

Despite some recent assertions by the IMF that the worst of the crisis will soon be over, and forecasts of a pick-up in growth of the global economy, the ILO has estimated a world-wide rise in unemployment by 50 million by the end of 2009, bringing total global unemployment to the highest level ever on record. The ranks of the working poor, those earning less than \$2 a day, will rise to 200 million. Given the already structured and multiple discriminations faced by women as workers in precarious, lower-paid, underpaid, atypical jobs which they combine with care-giving roles, the jobs crisis is affecting them disproportionately. With the shrinking of public sector budgets as a result of the crisis, they are left to shoulder an even greater burden of household care and social provisioning activities, without income or social compensation.

The export-led model of growth prescribed by the IFIs (International Financial Institutions) for the developing countries has resulted in the dismantling of the domestic food-producing sector in many countries, and coupled with speculation in food and other commodities has led to food scarcity, and rising prices for staple food items. Climate change and increasing drought conditions have further worsened the situation of food insecurity and water scarcity, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. These factors have had severe impacts on rural food producers, the majority of whom are women, and affected their capacity to feed their families. Levels of malnutrition in low-income countries have seen a dramatic rise, prompting UNICEF and the WFP to step up their food relief programmes in poor and vulnerable communities. The estimated number of the hungry has risen to 1 billion, the majority of those affected being women and children. 1.3 billion people lack access to basic health care services, while 100 million people are pushed into poverty every year by health care costs.

Globalization and Women's Employment

Globalization has no doubt opened up new opportunities for women's employment, both in the manufacturing and services sectors; yet women still have difficulty accessing employment, compensation and job mobility opportunities commensurate with their educational and skills levels. Gender plays a critical role in determining the value of work and the pay of women workers in the global health workforce and other social sectors. Gender-based pay inequities are historically based on the notion that a woman's primary role is home-based: caring for her family and tending to household chores. Women's roles in the workplace are thus seen as an extension of their roles in the home and pay structures are often determined accordingly. Pay inequity therefore remains a persistent problem faced by working women. No country in the world has achieved pay equity, defined as equal pay for equal work, or work of equal value. The pay gap in some industrialized countries such as the Nordic countries is now 12%, but in many countries it can be upwards of 50%.

Working women are to be found at the lowest end of global value chains, gaining little value added for home-based work for such products as carpets, garments, beady cigarettes. Export-led growth and Export Processing Zones (EPZs) have become an important tool for development growth, with mixed results in terms of impacts on young women who make up the majority of the workforce. Oftentimes they work under sweat shop conditions and are victims of sexual harassment. Their basic rights to join unions and benefit from the workers' protections guaranteed by collective agreements are denied. In many developing countries, a majority of working women (over 70%), are to be found in the informal economy, many as self-employed rural producers or urban retailers in markets or as street vendors. Their wages and conditions of work are precarious. The informal sector, oftentimes, is not covered by national labour legislation, and women workers in this sector are denied their basic workers' rights.

Unpaid care work is a major contributing factor to gender inequality and women's poverty. In many African countries, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has increased and intensified women's unpaid care work and further reduced their chances of securing paid, productive work.

Investing in Education as a human right

Investing in education as a human right is key to restore growth and sustainable development. The acute shortage of qualified and trained teachers, especially in the developing world, must be overcome. Given increasing enrolment levels, about 2.4 million teachers (1.2 million new teacher posts) will be needed between 2007 and 2015 in sub-Saharan Africa alone, to achieve Universal Primary Education. The achievement of quality public education is challenged by a number of factors: lack of training and professional development, growing recruitment on a contract basis, the HIV and AIDS pandemic, increasing natural disasters due to climate change, conflicts resulting in fragility and attacks on teachers, students and education institutions.

Addressing these challenges calls for an integrated approach, with policies that increase access to education for girls and boys from every social background, and enhance inclusion and quality at all levels and in all settings. Policies must build on a platform of investing in equity in education that combines large-scale recruitment with appropriate pre-service education and ongoing in-service training for teachers. It must include strong and effective leadership in schools, proper working conditions, relevant curricular and teaching resources that enable committed caring professional teachers to do the job well, and include all children in quality education.

Educating girls is the most effective and efficient development tool. Educated girls are able to negotiate having a smaller number of children, who are in their

turn healthier and better educated. Educated women play an increasingly active economic and political role at local and national levels.

Redressing the Chronic under-investment in Public Services

Chronic under-investment in public services in both industrialised and developing countries remains a significant barrier to the social and economic emancipation and empowerment of women.

Women, especially, rely on the availability of quality public health, social care, child care, water and energy distribution services. Where States fail to provide adequate public health and care services, the burden falls heavily on women to compensate for their non-availability. Universal access to quality public services is key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Across the world, the public sector is an important employer of women. In many cases it is the single largest employer of women outside the informal economy. Yet occupational segregation, undervaluation of women's work and the increasingly precarious nature of public sector jobs (through the use of outsourcing, short-term contracts, informal subcontracting and the indiscriminate use of temporary recruitment agencies) are factors inhibiting the true economic empowerment and advancement of women.

Recommendations

The dominant neo-liberal economic model of growth through skewed capital accumulation needs to give way to a social model of growth with shared prosperity through decent work, with gender equality at the heart of decent work. This must happen through a process of transformative change. Women must be active agents in this process of change, taking their places at leadership and decision-making levels in global and national-level decision-making bodies, and in the trade unions.

The policy and normative framework for gender equality and women's empowerment is set out in a number of instruments; and these should underpin the policies and programmes aimed at restoring growth with equity in global and national economies. Of paramount importance in this regard, are the following:

- **The Beijing Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.**
- **The ILO's Global Jobs Pact** adopted by the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2009), which proposes a comprehensive set of policy measures that countries should adopt to address the crisis, with a strong focus on employment creation, social protection, social dialogue, and

fundamental rights at work, in keeping with the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda.

- **The ILO Resolution concerning Gender Equality at the heart of decent work**, adopted by the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference (June 2009), which asserts that International Labour Standards are a primary means to promote gender equality in the world of work, and in that regard, emphasizes the importance of 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), the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No 175), and the Home-Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177). In addition, economic and social policies must integrate the Conventions that create enabling rights for gender equality: the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No 87), and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No 98).
- **Governments should further promote ILO Recommendation 198** on the Employment Relationship and adapt the scope of relevant laws and regulations in order to guarantee effective protection for all workers who perform work in the context of an employment relationship, including those in precarious or atypical forms of employment.
Legislative gaps that leave women and girls without legal protection and enjoyment of their full human and labour rights should be identified and eliminated.
- **Governments must invest significantly in public education today**, and make it a cornerstone of economic recovery plans.
- **Governments must invest significantly in public health and social care**, including child and elderly care, as well as public water and energy systems, as tools for achieving gender equality and mitigating the effects of the global economic crisis.
- It is important that policy-formulation and implementation processes at global, national and local levels be developed through **social dialogue, and multi-stakeholder consultations involving trade unions and women workers' representatives**, to ensure that gender equality and decent work objectives inform all policies, and their implementation.