



2010 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION
28 June - 23 July 2010

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE BREAKFAST
"THE GLOBAL JOBS PACT: CRISIS RECOVERY THROUGH WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT"

Summary

A High-level Segment Ministerial Breakfast Roundtable on "The Global Jobs Pact: Crisis Recovery through Women's Economic Empowerment" was co-organized by the ILO and UNDP on 29 June 2010. The roundtable was co-chaired by H. E. Moushira Mahmoud Khattab, Minister of State for Family and Population of Egypt and Ms María Angélica Ducci, Executive Director of the Office of the Director-General of the International Labour Organization. Keynote speakers included Ms Ronnie Goldberg, Executive Vice president of the United States Council for International Business, Ms Rania Antonopoulos, Director of the Gender Equality and the Economy Program of the Levy Economics Institute, Ms Marie Coleman, National Foundation for Australian Women, and Ms Jane Hodges, Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality of the ILO. Participants included ministers, permanent representatives to the United Nations, representatives from international organizations, and representatives of workers and civil society.

This Breakfast offered an opportunity to share experiences from a wide range of actors in the world of work, to learn of successful ground responses to the crisis inspired by the Pact, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of building a gender-responsive social protection floor combined with public employment guarantee schemes for the unemployed and working poor.

The **Global Jobs Pact** was designed to guide national and international policies aimed at stimulating economic recovery and providing social protection to working women and men and their families. The Pact can be used as a road map to analyze the impact of the crisis on women and men, identify areas where job opportunities could be created and where skills development training for women is needed, and develop policies that lead to sustainable and durable development, highlighting the importance of involving all social partners throughout.

It explicitly recognizes the importance of giving equal voice to women and men and the need for gender equality policy responses, and emphasizes the paramount importance of including women in crisis initiatives. Failing to do so has proven in the past to have a high social and economic cost, including growth in child labour rates.

In **Egypt**, the government has made substantial efforts to limit the impact of the crisis on women by developing and implementing programmes with a strong gender component, including initiatives to encourage companies to avoid sex discrimination in recruitment and during employment, ad hoc interventions for female-headed households, and stimulus packages for the poorest. An emergency fund had been set up by the Ministry responsible for labour and the labour unions active in particular industries with high rates of women employees, such as textiles, electronics and food industries, so as to continue paying workers during the crisis. The new Social Security Act proved a useful buffer for the most marginalized groups, including women. Training is a key element of the Egyptian response, including skill upgrading for women in the informal economy. Women's entrepreneurial development had also been encouraged through programmes run by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration, which had also contributed to the Cairo Platform of Action for Women Entrepreneurs African Development Bank/ILO, 2010). The gender sensitivity of such measures could be traced back to the fact that a parliamentary quota for women was ensuring that the gender dimension was heard when policy debates and decisions were underway.

The impact of the crisis on women in **Australia** was not so severe thanks to the prompt and efficient action taken by the government in developing and implementing stimulus programmes since the very early stage of the economic downturn. Such programmes focused on enhancing family spending capacities through increased pensions, income paid to care takers of the elderly and the sick, first home-owner grants, building of schools, extensive capital works programmes, tax benefits and a one-off direct cash payment to all low tax income bracket families. To this the government added skills upgrading measures (financing of more training places, and more subsidies, with a gender impact). In a second package, the government gave a direct cash grant to all residents so as to stimulate consumer spending. However, since a large number of women are 'hidden unemployed' they are not reflected in official statistics, and thus not eligible for some of the stimulus related initiatives. The existence of a

strong gender machinery within the government, and social partner involvement, had facilitated political thinking on the gender implications of the crisis and its different impact on women and men, and had led to the development of gender-sensitive strategies to overcome it.

The **employers** view the Pact as a very important policy document and its adaptability makes the Pact a tool that can be used at all levels and regions of the world. Moreover, the Pact recognizes the importance of entrepreneurship and the key role played by skills development and training to meet technological challenges in time of economic crisis.

The **workers** believe that the crisis might be seen as a means to redistribute justice and that social dialogue can provide an effective and sustainable response to serious economic difficulties. Cash transfers and other initiatives contained in the Global Jobs Pact can surely help to shorten the time lag between growth recovery and labour market recovery but employment creation and decent work must be the common goal. The ILO Resolution on Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2009 complements the Global Jobs Pact in eliminating sex discrimination at work and promoting gender equality.

Bearing in mind that decent work is what really empowers women and that active labour market policies are crucial to create decent work for women, **employment guarantee policies and cash transfers** can be and are often used by governments as a short-term response to economic crises. India and South Africa had been implementing such policies on a longer term. In India, about 40 million rural households had been given the right to paid work for 100 days per year and the government is planning to extend the number of days to 150 a year in the second phase of the programme. Monitoring proves that women in particular have benefited from the scheme. Providing income for households enhanced the capacity to contribute to economic growth. Moreover, the importance of focusing on both physical infrastructure and social services (e.g. home-based care and early childhood education) was emphasized. In fact, it has been estimated that investments in the social sector promotes a win-win-win situation for economic growth, employment and women's empowerment.

In **Chile**, the government's main priorities are women's economic empowerment and reconciliation between work and family. A gender-sensitive social protection floor has been created, that includes recognition of women's unpaid work, a specific focus on female-headed households, the promotion on women's entrepreneurship, measures to enhance women access to social security, maternity and pension benefits for all women and health care for all. Moreover, the programme "Chile Solidario", created in 2002 to combat extreme poverty, is now providing access to cash transfers and connections to the public and private networks of social services to the most vulnerable segments of the society, including early childhood care that enables women to seek paid employment or undertake income-generating activities.

Canada's commitment to overcome the global economic and financial crisis is two-fold. On the one hand, the government is working on three levels: food security and support to small-scale farmers, both women and men; access to finance, especially for women entrepreneurs, as part of sustainable growth strategies; and education and health to increase opportunities for children and youth to escape poverty. On the other hand, in order to provide support to those countries which are, now even more than before, counting on the help of external donors, Canada is committed to implement the G8 accountability framework to address the gap between stated commitments and necessary actions to put the MDGs back on track.

Nicaragua recognizes that a shift of priorities due to the current crisis can pose a threat to job creation and to the promotion of Decent Work. A solution that can increase decent work opportunities for women is the creation of micro and small enterprises. In **Indonesia** the Business in a Box initiative has generated 1600 new micro enterprises that count 93% of women employees. The immediate benefit for the families is a significant increase in income and at the community level, these entrepreneurs were able to generate employment for other women. But stakeholders need to hear of good practices on how crisis response packages, such as extended social protection, are actually working in the various national circumstances.

This debate demonstrated that to date a big part of the responsibility to overcome the current crises has rested on States, that also have the legal obligation to protect the rights of women, including equal opportunities and treatment in employment. It is important to consider the synergies between employment creation and state

provision of education and health services and pension schemes. In this regard, further efforts need to be made to evaluate the impact of social sector interventions on poverty reduction and development overall, and the development of a monitoring system of the Global Jobs Pact – foreseen in the ILO and UNDP's commitment to promote the Pact described below - could help both in the evaluation and in the programming phase. Corporate social responsibility and public-private partnership initiatives can support governments in their efforts to overcome the current economic and financial crisis and achieve recovery through the economic empowerment of women.

Moreover, following a decision of the UNDP Executive Board in 2010, the ILO and the UNDP have been working together to implement the Global Jobs Pact. UNDP and ILO are currently developing an action plan, which recognizes that, particularly at the country level, the Pact can have a visible impact on the lives of women and men and their families. In the development and implementation of the action plan, the outcome of this discussion will be taken into high consideration.