



International Labour Organization



United Nations Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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## Quality Education for Girls Leads to Decent Work for Women

55<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW – United Nations, New York, 23 February 2011

### Summary

The side event on “Quality Education for Girls Leads to Decent Work for Women” was co-organized by ILO and UNESCO on 23 February 2011. Panelists included Ms. Jane Hodges, Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality of the ILO, Ms. Gulsar Corat, Director of the Gender Equality Division of UNESCO, Ms. Jan Eastman, Deputy Secretary General of Education International, and Ms. Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. The event was attended by over 100 people. Participants included members of CSW national delegations, representatives of permanent missions to the United Nations, and representatives of workers and civil society.

The event offered an opportunity to share views and experiences from a wide range of actors on the importance of ensuring girls' access to education in all fields in order to facilitate their access to employment and decent work on an equal footing with men also in those sectors where they are under-represented.

Girls are undereducated or uneducated in many fields, but in particular in science and technology. School programmes, traditional beliefs and stereotypes have over the years channeled boys towards scientific and technological fields of education and girls towards humanistic disciplines. Moreover, a UNESCO study demonstrates that women are encouraged to stay at home and take care of the family instead of being encouraged to go to school and attain higher degrees of education. Making school programmes and curricula in science and technology more appealing to girls and the presence of qualified (female) teachers in all fields of education might help to overcome these obstacles.

**Ms. Elizabeth Broderick** noted that in Australia participation of women in all fields of education is high (with the exception of migrant and indigenous women) but this does not translate into decent work opportunities. Discrimination in the labour market is multi-faceted. First of all, the rooted belief that women have to stay at home and take care of the children to be good mothers and men go to work; secondly, women are still victims of sexual harassment, making the workplace less safe and not inclusive. In Australia, with a view to enforce the existing law, employers are currently developing strategies to effectively combat and prevent such harassment. There is still a lack of equal pay between women and men (e.g. women in law are paid 16.8% less and women in science 10%) and few women in decision-making positions (only 7% in senior executive level and 11% in boardrooms). To partially address this, the Human Rights Commission has reached agreement with the Australian Stock Exchange to have publicly listed companies set targets and report annually. Finally, lack of flexible working arrangements and other work/family balance measures, and employers' reluctance to take measures in this regard, result in women unequal access to and participation in the labour force.

**Ms. Jan. Eastman** affirmed that being in school does not necessarily guarantee a solid learning process. This can only be ensured by the presence of good, well trained and capable teachers at all levels and in all fields of education. Recent cuts operated by governments as a consequence of the economic and financial crisis is affecting education both in terms of quality of services provided (e.g. class sizes, toilets sanitary and other facilities) to students and in terms of human resources (cuts in the number of teachers, employing non-qualified teachers).

If the school can ensure a high-quality level of education, be free, provide a safe environment and provide free meals to students, poor families might have more incentive to send both boys and girls to school and not have them work to provide an income. This is particularly important in developing countries, where girls, through appropriate education, have the opportunity to access different sectors of employment instead of being “trapped” into domestic work, child labour or in the entertainment show business that in most cases results into prostitution. And good teachers who have been sensitized to gender issues can be the living examples (role models) of where good education can lead to.

Even if achieving good education does not guarantee access to decent work, it is for sure a good starting point. Participating in quality education and training at all levels is a right of all women and democratic societies have to ensure the attainment of this right. The Education International Declaration on Schools as Safe Sanctuaries reaffirms this principle and calls for joint efforts to ensure protection of teachers and students at school (particularly women and girls), and end impunity for attacks on students, education personnel, and education facilities. Governments have to invest in education and political commitment to fight discrimination and gender inequality. Some progress has been made but it is not yet enough.

**Ms. Gulsar Corat** said that it was unacceptable that there was a high drop out rate for girls in secondary education levels which were important formative years. She stressed the need for quality education but governments were not investing in education, and gave the example of developing countries only allocating 4% of the budget to education. As well during the crisis, cuts in education may lead to many parents sending boys to school instead of girls which would lead to a lost generation of non educated girls.

**Ms. Jane Hodges** highlighted that education should provide girls and boys with the necessary skills to meet labour market's needs. Education, skills development and vocational training will ensure that students ‘learn to earn’. In Argentina, for example, women have been trained in new technological fields and this has resulted into a new set of employment opportunities for them.

The ILO Global Jobs Pact affirmed that financial crisis has to be seen as an opportunity to reach positive gender equality outcomes but this meant that recovery packages need to be gender sensitive and not be seen as sexist. In the context of the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW, this can be translated into three main actions: creating decent work opportunities for teachers; increasing the number of female teachers in science and technology and supporting them with equal pay, career advancement including opportunities to balance work and family and the ability to resume careers after family breaks; and ensuring equal pay for women and men. Moreover, managerial opportunities for women in schools, university, and ministries should be created.

Comments from the audience included sharing of good practices in access to science and technology for women and girls (e. g. Haifa, Israel); access to quality education for girls in rural areas; the involvement of the private sector in education particularly in times of crisis; the glass ceiling faced by women scientists and the role the government can play in this regard.