



International Seminar

Gender Mainstreaming in Technical Cooperation Projects:
For the Labour and Social Spheres

Decent work for women
An ILO proposal to accelerate the implementation
of the Beijing Platform for Action

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Decent work for women

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The Beijing + 5 process is an important re-affirmation of the globalization of a commitment to achieve gender equality. We take another step towards globalizing social progress when we champion gender equality as a matter of rights and social justice as well as efficiency and good business sense.

Juan Somavia,

Symposium on "Decent Work for Women,"

24 March 2000

Gender on the international agenda

Impressive economic and technological progress has been made during the latter part of the last century. Many new economic opportunities have been created. But the pace of social progress has lagged behind the accelerated pace of the new global economy. Not every man or woman has been able to reap the benefits of economic progress. Inequalities within and between countries have increased, and for many, globalization and economic restructuring have brought increased insecurity, uncertainty or marginalization. In some circumstances globalization has decreased gender inequalities, particularly in countries where it led to an unprecedented employment of female labour, but in other cases it has intensified them. Progress towards the achievement of gender equality has been far from sustained. In periods of crisis, economic restructuring or economic transition social spending is the first to be cut, which makes it more difficult for women to balance productive work and care work.

Social concerns have become more pressing and all international fora acknowledge the need for combining economic and social goals into an integrated framework. For economic efficiency and social efficiency to go hand in hand, all members of society - men and women alike, the young and the old, the able and the disabled - must realize their human potential to contribute to development and fully benefit from growth. This cannot be achieved and sustained without the participation of women in all walks of life in the social, economic, political or cultural spheres. Hence, all the global conferences and summits of the 1990s have placed gender equality on their priority agenda.

Equality and non-discrimination are at the core of the rights-based approach endorsed at the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development and strengthened at the Fourth Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995. Granting the same legal status to men and women is the first necessary step, but it is not sufficient. The promotion of gender equality also requires an enabling environment in which human rights can be enjoyed by all. Economic growth opens up new opportunities but it does not automatically provide the means to seize them. This has often been the case for women. The rights-based approach and the development-based approach, understood as widening choices and increasing capabilities, are necessary complements.

The ILO has a role to play as agent for change, catalyst and advocate of the link between economic efficiency and social efficiency. The Organisation approaches gender equality as a matter of human rights, social justice, economic efficiency and sustainable development. ILO's primary goal is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

The Beijing Platform for Action and the ILO's mandate

The twelve critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) are all related to the ILO's mandate. In 1996, the ILO Governing Body set the strategic orientation for ILO follow-up activities to implement the Beijing PFA. Seven of the twelve areas were identified for more focussed implementation, which can be summarised under three headings:

- poverty eradication and productive employment;
- working conditions and social protection;
- international labour standards and normative action on women workers.

Within that framework, a number of specific programmes and projects were launched, including the International Programme on *More and Better Jobs for Women*. Since 1999, ILO's activities to implement the PFA have extended to other areas, in particular, women and armed conflict, women and HIV/AIDS, social dialogue, and institutional and financial arrangements for gender mainstreaming. Great importance is attached to a holistic approach.

Women in the world of work: progress and gaps

A changing context

Globalization, economic restructuring and the flexibilization of production processes have resulted in changes in employment patterns. Employment has become more uncertain and unstable for all workers and an increasing number of women need and wish to generate an independent income. Over the last decades changes in demographic profiles and employment have affected the daily life of men, women and families. There has been a rise in life expectancy, a decrease in the size of families, a greater mobility of people, and the number of two-earner and single-parent families has grown. The terms and conditions of participation of men and women in the labour market have been redefined. As more flexibility in production processes has been introduced and the sector of services has expanded the demand for female labour has risen. But the enhanced participation of women in paid work is not only driven by economic factors and constraints, it also responds to changes in the perception and aspirations of women with regards to their role in society and priorities in life. A higher proportion of the workforce than before is confronted with the competing demands of work and family responsibilities. New trends in labour force participation have emerged.

Trends in female labour force participation

Since the beginning of the 1980s the participation of women in paid work has increased significantly and the gap between male and female labour force participation rates has decreased. Women now represent over forty percent of the global labour force. Various components explain differences in the level and terms of women's participation between countries: the structure and the organisation of the production system; the labour market conditions and regulations; the training and education system; and the dominant social attitudes and values, including those concerned with gender roles. But, overall, more jobs have been created for women than for men.

Better educated women are reaching positions of responsibility in higher numbers and more women are creating their own enterprises.

These positive developments regarding the participation of women in paid employment certainly makes their economic contribution more visible. But has their employment status improved? Women continue to be predominantly found in certain types of occupations in the service sector, in the informal economy and in agriculture. As a group, they are concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, and their likelihood of engaging in part-time or casual employment leaves them more susceptible to poverty and social exclusion than their male counterparts. Better educated women rarely break through the so-called 'glass ceiling' blocking them from reaching top-level management and professional positions. Participation in decision-making remains one of the most resistant areas for gender equality. The higher the position the more glaring the gender gap - women hold less than five per cent of the top jobs in corporations.

Certain categories of women are particularly vulnerable: rural women, those working in the informal sector, migrant women, the young, the old and the disabled. At both ends of the age spectrum, the very young and the old face particular dilemmas in the labour markets. Girls are more likely than boys to be the invisible workers and the victims of the worst forms of child labour. Young women tend to have higher unemployment rates than young men. Older women face continued discrimination in the labour market and they often have to assume care-giving responsibilities within their families, rather than being taken care of. Furthermore, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to international trafficking. Even women who migrate legally as contract labourers often face serious exploitation, including sexual harassment and other forms of violence, at the workplace.

Overall, the increase in the quantity of women's employment has not been matched by an improvement in the quality of their employment. Some positive developments have occurred, but progress has remained patchy and limited. There have been opportunities for better jobs for a small minority while the majority of women workers remain disadvantaged:

i) on the supply side of the labour market: women are disadvantaged relative to men in terms of the quality of their labour supply and preparing for the job market. Gender inequality persists in access to and control over productive resources, and in training and retraining opportunities. Women also have not been backed by the practical measures and basic support services and infrastructure they need to enable them to actually take up opportunities in the formal labour market;

ii) on the demand side of the labour market: gender segregation by occupation still represents a major labour market rigidity and source of labour market inequalities. Women continue to face discrimination in recruitment for employment and barriers to occupational mobility. Different values and remuneration continue to be attached to men's and women's jobs, so that labour markets are still characterized by wage differentials and discrimination on the basis of sex;

iii) in terms of labour market processes: women tend to face greater difficulties than men in gaining access to labour market schemes and other forms of policy assistance if unemployed or if they are in particularly vulnerable economic or social positions. They may also need special forms of assistance to enable them to compete on an equal basis with men for employment.

Inequalities between men and women in the labour market have not, therefore, decreased significantly. The inferior position of a majority of women in the labour market in terms of wages and conditions of work and employment creates serious problems especially for those who are primary income earners. The growth of certain types of work mainly undertaken by

women (part-time, home working, etc.) is also associated with increasing polarisation within the female labour force, and between men and women.

Crucial linkages

Three crucial linkages need to be taken into account if the situation of women in the world of work is to be improved:

The linkage between the care economy and paid work. The spheres of care and paid work are intertwined. The care economy includes some unpaid work, the provision of public social services and services bought in the market. The trade-offs between unpaid and paid work bear a cost which falls mostly on women and becomes more tangible at times of crisis. This is particularly penalizing in the case of poor women. Only combined strategies aiming at both the sphere of care and the world of gainful employment will be successful in changing the uneven distribution of unpaid work. The elimination of gender discrimination and the improvement of employment conditions in paid work will have a positive effect on care. A better distribution of care work is impossible without equality in paid work.

The linkage between the formal and informal economy. Since the 1980s the informal economy has grown in all regions of the world - in developing as well as developed countries. It is made up of heterogeneous productive and income-generating activities. A first segment consists of the traditional 'informal sector' in which low-skilled and low productivity activities act as a huge 'labour sponge' which mopped up the excess labour force unable to find a job in the formal sector. A second segment emerges from changes in the organization of production, globalization and technological changes. Increasing numbers of jobs are either 'informalized' within formal enterprises (e.g. workers labouring in the enterprise premises without a written contract) or outsourced and subcontracted by formal sector firms (big, registered, visible) to small workshops, micro enterprises, and homeworkers in the informal sector. This is traced to enterprises' search for flexibility and lower labour costs, to transfer the cost of demand fluctuations outside the firm, to avoid costs entailed by increasing enterprise capacity, and to avoid labour conflicts and trade unionism. A third segment, much smaller, is made up of high productivity services provided by independent professionals. The majority of new jobs are created in the informal economy and, in most countries, the proportion of women working in the informal economy is significantly higher than the proportion of men. The survival strategy adopted by poor households provides the informal sector with a low-skilled and low productivity female labour force. Though not all work in the informal economy consists of 'bad' jobs, the vast majority are precarious, vulnerable and low quality.

The linkage between quality of employment and social protection. Small businesses, informal sector workers, homeworkers, domestic workers, migrant labour, where women predominate or are heavily represented, are often outside the scope of traditional social protection systems. But in addition to forms of employment traditionally excluded from conventional systems of protection, new alarming trends have emerged: the informalization of labour arrangements and increasing flexibility measures have resulted in a situation where many workers, such as part-time workers or homeworkers and subcontractors, who were formerly protected by social protection measures, are no longer protected.

The main challenges

Despite the progress made over the last decades towards gender equality in the world of work gender remains an ubiquitous source of labour market inequalities and inadequately utilized human resources. Several areas critical to women workers required more focussed attention:

- Poverty and rising inequalities,
- The informal economy,
- The care economy,
- New systems of social protection for all women and men,
- The gender implications of a surplus labour market in the context of open economies,
- Matching supply of and demand for labour in the context of advances in communication and information technology,
- The impact of work or lack of work on the family and personal lives.
- Unstable markets and vulnerability to crises.

Many root causes of gender discrimination and women's vulnerability lie outside the labour market. Gender biases are first of all embedded in social perceptions and social norms which affect economic outcomes for women in virtually every sphere, be it property rights, employment or household allocation.

At the level of perceptions, there is often a divergence between a person's actual abilities, contributions and needs, and perceptions about these. In the labour market gender roles often define perceptions about abilities and can lead to discriminatory hiring and pay practices. Incorrect gender perceptions are also embedded in most public policies. Government transfers of land almost solely to men are linked to the perception of male responsibility and female dependency rather than to the fact that, in agrarian societies of today, more women than men work the land. Men are often seen as primary bread winners and women at best as helpers; this is often reflected, for example, in many social security schemes.

Like perception, social norms enter almost every sphere of activity. Everywhere they define the gender division of labour within and outside the home, they may even define whether women should work outside the home. Social norms can thus severely restrict women's economic options by discouraging them from taking up jobs, limiting the range of tasks they may perform, defining child care as their duty, restricting their mobility, promoting certain job options, etc.

Gender inequality among workers takes, therefore, both a material form and an ideological form: the former is embedded in who commands public and private productive assets and the latter is embedded in social norms and perceptions. Both aspects must be addressed to effect change. Labour market policies should address as much as possible the causes of gender discrimination and not merely compensate for them; but at the same time, they have to be seen in relation to the enabling or disabling environment in which they are supposed to operate. Therefore, comprehensive strategies for providing full, productive and freely chosen employment for women will have labour market policies as an integral component but will also have to include legislative reforms, advocacy and sensitization, macro economic, budgetary and financial policies, institution building, group mobilization and organization, etc.

The ILO response: The Decent Work agenda

The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. All those who work, women and men, have rights at work. Not only wage workers in formal enterprises, but also the self-employed, casual and informal workers, the hidden, predominantly female workers of the care economy or of the domestic scene.

The Decent Work concept is based on the expressed wish of men and women for work that will allow them and their families to have access to a decent standard of living. Decent work means meeting or exceeding core social standards - setting a threshold for work and employment which

embodies universal rights, and which for a given society is consistent with its values and goals. Decent work is based on the realities, values and goals of a given society. But it is a dynamic concept the content of which evolves with social and economic progress of a given country. The Decent Work agenda puts gender equality and development issues at the heart of the ILO agenda.

How can the goal of promoting decent work be achieved? In the work of ILO it is seen as the synthesis of four strategic objectives: achieving fundamental principles and rights at work; creation of greater employment and income opportunities for women and men; extending social protection; and promoting social dialogue.

These objectives are closely intertwined: respect for fundamental principles and rights is a precondition for the construction of a socially legitimate labour market; social dialogue is the means by which workers, employers and their representatives engage in debate and interchange on the means to achieve this. Employment creation is the essential instrument for raising living standards and widening access to incomes, while social protection provides the means to achieve income security and security of the working environment. These different dimensions of decent work reinforce each other.

Achieving fundamental principles and rights at work

The ILO has a global role to play in setting labour standards. The fundamental principle of the Organisation is that every individual at work has rights, so its strong commitment to equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women in the world of work has long been part of its mandate. It is reflected in existing instruments of direct relevance to gender equality:

- Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), adopted in 1951.
- Maternity Protection Convention (revised), 1952 (No. 103). The revision process began in 1997. The second discussion will be held at the International Labour Conference in June 2000.
- Discrimination in Employment and Occupation Convention (No.111), adopted in 1958,
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No.156), adopted in 1981.
- Part-time work Convention (No. 175), adopted in 1994.

Since the Beijing conference the International Labour Conference adopted three more instruments relevant to women and girls:

- the Home Work Convention (No. 177) and Recommendation (No. 184) in 1996;
- the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998;
- the Worst forms of Child Labour Convention adopted in June 1999 and which calls for account to be taken of the special situation of girls.

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

The adoption of the Declaration marked the renewed universal commitment amongst Members to respect, promote and realise the following principles: freedom of association, effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour, effective abolition of child labour, and elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. The Declaration was the ILO's follow up to the Social Summit in Copenhagen, where seven ILO Conventions were identified as the minimum social platform for the global economy.

The promotion of the Declaration will help deepen the understanding of how fundamental principles and rights reinforce development, democracy and equity, and help empower all women and men. The elimination of child labour can be taken as an example to illustrate how the Declaration is an instrument for development. Research has established that there is a strong link between child labour and poverty, therefore the eradication of child labour can only be sustainable in the long term if development results in jobs for parents and education for children. Inequalities in asset and income distribution have also been identified as dominant causes of poverty. Inequalities have very strong gender dimensions. The rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining constitute powerful means to overcome the disadvantages and constraints that women confront in the labour market as well as in the household and community arenas. As the Declaration addresses workers both within and outside the formal labour market, it can contribute to the social and economic empowerment of a large proportion of the working women. It can also help building up new avenues for women's representation and participation in social dialogue.

All ILO member States have an obligation to respect the fundamental principles embodied in the Declaration, whether or not they have ratified the seven individual core conventions. The Declaration is a promotional tool and its adoption has spurred a wave of further ratifications of two core conventions in particular. Since Beijing nineteen new countries ratified Convention No.111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) bringing total number of ratifications to hundred and forty one. And seventeen further ratifications were registered under Convention No.100 on Equal remuneration, bringing total ratifications to hundred and forty three. Those two Conventions, directly concerning gender equality, are among the most ratified. The follow-up mechanism to the Declaration makes it possible to determine the technical assistance which the ILO could provide to improve the implementation of these fundamental principles and rights. The gender perspective is being integrated into the follow-up process in reporting and technical cooperation activities.

Gaps between de jure and de facto gender equality

The inclusion of anti-discrimination laws in national legislation and labour code does not necessarily result in equal opportunity for all. A factor which undermines gender equality at work is associated with the differences between men and women with regard to the employment patterns they are engaged in. Women tend in fact to be concentrated in forms of work which are often excluded from the realm of labour law and industrial relations institutions. This calls for a more proactive and gender-sensitive approach to standard-setting in the labour domain.

Also the rights in law have to be made effective in practice. Serious obstacles prevent women workers from exercising their rights, even where national laws provide equality between women and men *de jure*. This is due to a lack of awareness of these rights and the inefficiency of enforcement mechanisms, combined with cultural resistance, traditional practices and lack of political commitment. In order to achieve substantive equality, not merely formal equality, proactive measures are also necessary. Key tools for promoting women workers' rights are: (i) law enforcement mechanisms; (ii) information, dissemination and training; (iii) the creation of a core group for advocacy, mobilization, coordination and monitoring; and (iv) action by trade unions and partnerships with a wide range of groups from civil society.

Promoting employment and income opportunities

First of all, decent work means productive and remunerative work for both women and men. The creation of jobs and income-generating activities should be at the centre of the economy and of innovative growth. In recent years small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal sector

have been particularly important in providing work for women. While it is necessary to create the greatest possible number of jobs for both men and women, the quality of those jobs must be decent.

More and better jobs

The qualitative approach to employment is at the heart of 'decent work.' The quality of employment is a multi-dimensional index influenced by a whole range of components: wage, non-wage benefits, regularity of employment, length and terms of the employment contract, social protection (health, unemployment, pension), representation (trade-union or other forms), working time, intensity of work, occupational risks, participation in decision-making, possibility of career advancement or skill up-grading, social status attached to a job etc. Women continue to suffer from specific labour market discrimination in many of these respects. Gender sensitive labour market policies should be designed to help women improve their labour market position. These should aim at:

Widening occupational choices

For working women, sex segregation constitutes a determinant factor of the quality of employment. Occupational segregation by sex is a world wide phenomenon. It is not only detrimental for women in terms of quality of employment, it is also a major source of labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency. Women are employed in a narrower range of occupations than men and are concentrated in subaltern positions. Equal opportunity policies and measures to reduce occupational segregation should assist men to enter into traditional 'female' occupations as well as assist women to enter traditional 'male' occupations.

There are many complementary ways to achieve this goal, in order to tackle the multiple sources of occupational segregation by sex:

- *Facilitating policies* such as the provision of child care and other services to workers with family responsibilities. Generally women, not men, are constrained by family and household responsibilities.
- *Affirmative action and equal opportunity* programmes, as well as anti-discrimination laws, are important to break down barriers based on sex stereotypes.
- *Increased education and training for women in non-traditional subjects*

But the most effective efforts lie with changing gender stereotypes and typical prejudices inside and outside the labour market regarding the supposed abilities, preferences and the 'appropriate' work and societal roles for men and women, as these beliefs and prejudices help to justify implicit and explicit discrimination against women. Hence, the importance of policies and programmes which attempt to increase gender-sensitivity and eliminate gender stereotypes - such as through media, in the work-place, in trade unions, in employers' organizations and in schools, in order to increase awareness that individual men and women have similar capabilities for all types of work.

Developing skill acquisition and training

Gender segregation is seen to start at the point of entry to the labour market but is to a large extent predetermined through choices made in the education and training systems. Qualifications enhance job prospects, earning potential and employment aspirations, as well as access to more rewarding areas of employment. In socially progressive societies it is also associated with the expression of more egalitarian sex role attitudes, a rejection of the traditional breadwinner

model, and a modest modification of the division of domestic work in the home. The provision of pre-employment and on-the-job training and retraining in vocational and technical skills has been recognized as an effective labour market policy not only for enhancing the employability of workers and boosting efficiency and growth, but also as a crucial equal opportunity strategy.

Once in the labour market women are again at a disadvantage in terms of training. Instead of acting as compensation mechanism to improve the labour market position of workers, training schemes and attempts to promote lifelong learning have had, in general, a reverse cumulative effect favouring the better skilled and better educated and, on the other hand, some evidence suggests that training systems may actually reinforce occupational segregation based on gender. Exclusion from workplace-based training is one of the main forms of direct discrimination against women.

The disadvantages of women in training stem from the following factors:

- Women are often perceived as representing a higher risk for skill investments by employers as they are seen as dropping out of the labour force for child bearing and the care of children.
- A majority of women work in atypical jobs or/and in the informal sector where provisions for training are poor.
- The demand for female labour is concentrated in unskilled jobs with no prospects for career development.
- Women are underrepresented in high technology capital intensive industrial sectors, where there are better opportunities for training.

To promote equal access to labour markets, training and retraining policies could include:

i) Setting targets (quota percentages or actual numbers) for girls in various types of training programmes, giving particular attention to encouraging them to go into scientific and technical fields and assisting them to break existing patterns of job segregation; special measures to facilitate the entry of workers with family responsibilities into labour market based training and retraining programmes; flexibility in the design, delivery and location of training courses and the provision of child care services as integral components of such programmes; establishing more effective linkages between training systems and labour markets, so that women are trained in employable skills and can put their training to economic use; and specially targeted measures to provide entrepreneurship training for women in self-employment - training provided to women not only in relevant skills but also in identification of business opportunities as part of a larger package including credit schemes, marketing support, access to new technology, etc.

ii) Support services which can help women to secure and keep jobs. This is a particularly important aspect for women because responsibilities for domestic chores and care of children or the aged often reduces their ability to participate fully in the labour market. Labour market policies could therefore encourage employers to help workers to meet family obligations through the provision of workplace creches, mobile nursing care, sponsored school holiday programmes, etc. Government or community support or coordination could enhance these employer initiatives. More broadly, measures recognizing the role of men in sharing family responsibilities, including the provision of paternity leave, should also be encouraged. Geographical labour mobility assistance is important generally for dealing with imbalances between the location of labour supply and demand. Such assistance, in the form of job vacancy information, realistic information on working conditions especially if the job is overseas, active job search assistance, etc., is especially important for women from rural areas and those considering overseas migration because they tend to have lower levels of education and less access to information than

men. Help to better prepare women for work in overseas labour markets is needed, including measures to protect them from exploitation and abuses.

Enhancing the demand for female labour

While labour market policies alone may not increase the general level of employment nor achieve satisfactory overall employment outcomes, they can change the composition of demand for labour and employment outcomes for particular groups of workers. An important aspect of demand side labour market policies should be to improve the distribution of productive and remunerative opportunities by sex.

Action on the demand for female labour can be of four main types:

- Changing the incentives to promote private sector employment.
- Public sector employment. The government can and should always be the "model employer", in terms of practising equality of opportunity and treatment for women in its own policy of recruitment, promotion or redeployment within the public sector.
- Direct wage-employment creation schemes. They tend to provide temporary direct employment for the most poor and needy but often discriminate against women, reinforcing gender inequalities in terms of access to paid work. Such projects are sometimes seen as a "last resort" labour market policy or as part of a social safety net. They could have the potential to indirectly enhance longer term employment opportunities.
- Support to self-employment, entrepreneurship development and small business.

Improving women's awareness of employment opportunities

Gender-sensitive labour market information has to be an integral component of labour market policies. Firstly, because the invisibility of women in many labour markets is a major reason for gender insensitive policies and programmes. Realistic and timely information is needed about the economic role of women, especially about those in atypical forms of work and in vulnerable positions in the labour market. Such information is needed by national and local policy makers and the social partners to design more effectively targeted labour market policies and programmes. Secondly, because women jobseekers themselves need the information to find out about employment opportunities and to put themselves in touch with potential employers. Women more often than men lack access to accurate and useful information, due to lower levels of education or higher socio-cultural constraints. Information on employment, wages, vacancies, hiring requirements, conditions of work, etc. should be made available easily and at low cost through, for example, employment exchanges in various localities.

Properly organized and supported by effective information systems, employment services can be an effective means of promoting the access of women to employment opportunities by registering them, providing skills and aptitude testing, vocational guidance and counselling, teaching them how to conduct a successful job search and interpersonal skills to sell themselves to employers, and matching them to employers' vacancies. But the problem is that female job seekers, especially if they are poorly educated, are not likely to register at an employment exchange. Special attention should also be given to the operations of private employment services and temporary employment agencies. There is considerable evidence that women are more likely than men to be the victims of serious malpractices and abuses, especially migrant workers.

Promoting enterprise development

The enterprise is at the heart of sustainable development and the necessary impetus must be given to the creation and development of enterprises. In recent years most jobs have been created by small and medium-sized enterprises.

There is a very high concentration of women business owners in the micro- and small enterprise categories and a very small proportion in the medium and larger enterprises. Also many women operate in low-value business sectors and they crowd into the informal sector. However emerging trends in several OECD countries show that women-owned enterprises are actually the fastest-growing category and that many of these enterprises are in high value added sectors, rather than the low-level subsistence enterprises that have traditionally predominated in developing countries. Research has also pointed to gender differences with regard to management styles and culture. Women entrepreneurs tend to encourage more cooperative and horizontal labour relations and to be more sensitive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities.

Support for women entrepreneurs must be planned and implemented in the context of gender equality in order for it to have lasting impact. The two major bottlenecks here are:

- entitlement and access to productive resources, in particular credit; and
- access to markets in order to find better and more remunerative business opportunities.

In many countries support has been provided to self-employment, entrepreneurial skills development and small-enterprise through programmes targeted to women. These programmes are significant for at least three related reasons: because self-employment and small businesses represent a potentially viable alternative to wage employment; because sometimes such employment better enables women to combine work with family responsibilities; and because the successful development of self employment and micro enterprises will determine whether the informal sector is a sector of last resort or might be a viable source of decent employment for women. To be effective, such programmes should consist of a coordinated and integrated set of measures that may need to include access to land, credit and other productive resources, skills training, assistance in business plan development and follow-up, marketing services, an enabling legislative framework, and other support services such as childcare.

Support should be provided to promote women in large and medium enterprises and not only in the small and micro-enterprises. Increasing emphasis should be placed on enhancing women's knowledge and skills in key areas such as management, production and finance. Support for women entrepreneurs must be set in the context of the entire supply chain. It is not enough just providing credit for women if they are not producing the right quality of products or they do not have access to distribution channels.

A policy framework to promote management development and entrepreneurship for women must be supported by necessary institutional change and matched with adequate resources if it is to be effective. There should be more emphasis placed on women moving into high-value non-traditional sectors. Support should be given to employers' organizations to assist and represent the views of women entrepreneurs and help them to develop networks.

Poverty eradication

The Beijing Conference acknowledged the increasing link between gender and poverty by identifying poverty as critical area of concern number one in the Platform for Action. Pockets of poverty exist everywhere in the world, including in industrialized countries, but half the poor are concentrated in south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of the poor are women and

almost everywhere gender is a dividing line and a determinant of poverty. Poverty is strongly associated with the rise in female headship. Not only women-headed households are more at risk of poverty but it is also much more difficult for them to break out of poverty. The processes which bring about poverty are different for men and women and understanding these processes are the key to developing appropriate strategies to combat poverty. As global changes take place the processes inducing poverty change. The same is true of gender biases.

An effective poverty eradication strategy has to have four main components: employment promotion, social protection, organization and structural policy reform. The ILO has been advocating the central role of employment in poverty alleviation strategies. Most women living in poverty are working women who are overworked and undertake multiple jobs but have low earnings. Defining appropriate strategies to promote better employment for low-income women in various sectors of activities is therefore the mainstay of poverty eradication.

Usually poverty eradication strategies means targeted programmes, but experience shows that without mainstreaming policy reform the impact of targeted programmes can be minimal and limited. An integrated approach is necessary. Based on experience from technical cooperation projects over the years, the ILO has developed a comprehensive and integrated approach to poverty reduction. The ILO programme on *Gender, poverty and employment* goes much beyond the income-generating projects and safety nets that have characterized most national responses to poverty eradication. With poverty alleviation as its central objective, it tackles all aspects of the promotion of decent work: the expansion of employment of course but also, access to assets, to financial resources, to social protection, to skills and training, and the ability to initiate change through organisational and negotiating power. The organization of low-income women and effective representation of their voice is key to poverty eradication strategies.

Crisis response and reconstruction

The volatility of today's financial and product markets and the precarization of employment have increased the vulnerability of men, women and families to crises, whether those are due to armed conflict, natural disasters, financial and economic downturns, or social and political transitions. Decent work is a critical goal for bringing crisis-affected people back into decent life. But work itself is adversely impacted by the crisis. Crisis increases poverty, crisis worsens employment and income-generating opportunities and crisis reduces productive assets.

Some gender repercussions of crisis can be illustrated in the context of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, as peace is one of the strongest felt aspirations of women. Modern warfare has changed and many civilians, including women and children, are affected by war. Demographic changes take place. There is a decrease in the number of men and an increase in the number of female-headed households. Some gender role changes occur as women have to assume new responsibilities. There is also an increase in the number of orphaned children and disabled people, who generally have to be cared for by women. Women have often been described as the only safety nets available to a conflict-affected society.

Post-conflict reconstruction, reintegration and peace-building processes should not aim at reestablishing the previous *status quo* situation between men and women. on the contrary they provide a window of opportunities for bringing about social justice, for addressing gender inequalities and for decreasing vulnerabilities. All the resources available within the society should be tapped, women as well as men. In a crisis context women have to solve a multitude of problems and some very innovative solutions are found. The formulation of reintegration programmes should capitalize on these positive changes in gender roles. Yet women continue to be absent from the peace negotiation tables.

Gender should be mainstreamed in the planning and at the inception of all post-conflict and reconstruction programmes. An alternative approach is the community-based inclusionary approach. This means planning for a whole community, i.e men, women and children together, rather than targeting a specific groups such as demobilized combatants for example.

A number of women's groups are working tirelessly on these issues. Their capacity should be strengthened so that they can do more and make their voices heard. Skills training and other technical cooperation programmes should enhance women's capacity to move from the traditional low-level vulnerable occupations and activities to enter into rewarding and decent activities. The complex crisis context demands complex responses and a major facet is the integration of the gender dimensions emerging from crises.

Extending social protection

Every worker needs a minimum level of social and income security. In the current socio-economic context, the primary objective of social protection is to reduce insecurity in the world of work, to ensure safe and decent conditions of work, to maintain incomes and ensure adequate access to care and social services for all. In many countries a large proportion, sometimes a majority, of workers and their families lack or are excluded from access to basic protection.

Human security and social protection

Basic security and protection is the cornerstone of decent work. Social protection mechanisms must ensure that people are able to work productively and safely and to face up to job loss, disability, sickness, maternity, and old age. Social protection is not the same for all workers. Those in the formal sector are vastly better protected than those working in the informal sector. And within the formal sector, protective measures affect men and women differently due to the respective characteristics of their employment, the way benefits have been structured and the differentiated social and economic roles they play. Increase in employment flexibility has caused a proliferation of atypical forms of work, and introduced a much greater diversity of individual situations and working life patterns for both men and women. Women's lower earnings and irregular employment patterns undermine their capacity to participate in and benefit from contributory social insurance schemes.

It is necessary to take into account the specific characteristics of women in employment, which vary from country to country, when dealing with equality of treatment in social security and social protection. In industrialized countries, there has been a great deal of progress in social protection, although it has not responded sufficiently to the growth in atypical forms of employment for women - part-time, intermittent wage-earning jobs, or jobs in family enterprises. In developing countries progress has been very limited as the existing social security programmes are designed to cover mainly workers in the formal sector, of whom women represent a small proportion. In economies in transition, there is a danger of regression linked to the effects of economic adjustment on employment and social security schemes, particularly in the areas most affecting working women - child-raising facilities, health care and old-age pensions.

Women's working lives are greatly determined by the presence of children in the family. In order to achieve equality of treatment, measures must be taken to ensure that women's specific role in reproduction has no adverse effect on their employment. These measures include:

- health care for pregnant women and mothers;
- cash benefits and maternity leave;

- arrangements to better reconcile family and occupational responsibilities, and give fathers the opportunity to play a recognized role in raising children;
- other types of collective responsibility; family allowances, taxation arrangements, childcare systems.

The issue of maternity protection has raised concerns, at times controversial, with regard to protection of employment, equality and non-discrimination, and the health protection of mothers and children. In response to these concerns, the Governing Body of the ILO has placed the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No.103) and its accompanying Recommendation (No.95) on the agenda of the Sessions of the International Labour Conference in 1999 and 2000.

The challenge of social protection is to devise solutions which eliminate discrimination in the application of the basic principles of social security while extending coverage to those who are now excluded. The governance and efficiency of existing social security systems need to be improved but innovative new schemes especially for workers of the informal economy also have to be designed. Micro health insurance schemes have shown that extending outreach is not only a matter of finance but also of ability to meet the specific needs of the workers, taking into account the differing roles, constraints, characteristics and concerns of both men and women.

Occupational safety and health

Working conditions and the working environment are sources of health hazards. Occupational segregation leads to exposure to particular health and safety hazards. In general women undertake tasks with lower risks of accidents than men but are more exposed to specific health risks. Certain health disorders are related to occupations or industries which employ large numbers of women workers. To quote but a few examples:

- In agriculture women are exposed to harmful pesticides and to heavy work during crop cultivation and harvesting. Traditional "female" tasks are less likely to be assisted by mechanical devices than "male" tasks.
- Workers in micro-electronics industries, where women are over represented, are exposed to hazardous chemicals. Assembly processes can provoke repetitive trauma disorders and other musculoskeletal health impairments.
- In nursing, an occupation dominated by women, there is a high incidence of back injuries due to the nature of the work.

Also women workers are more prone to suffer from stress, chronic fatigue, premature aging and other psycho-social and health effect because of their dual reproductive and economic roles. One of major causes of stress is fear of unknown situations and lack of control over the duties to be carried out and over the organization of work. Women often hold less qualified and more precarious jobs than their male counterparts and perform activities not linked to decision-making.

A pressing concern: HIV/AIDS

Worldwide nearly 34 million people are currently living with HIV/AIDS and women count for 43 per cent of all people over 15 infected with HIV and AIDS. The problem is particularly severe in Africa where six out of ten HIV-infected men, eight of out of ten infected women and nine out of ten infected children live. Young women of child-bearing age (15-24) are twice as likely to be infected as males of the same age group.

HIV/AIDS is jeopardizing efforts to develop human capital and forcing entire families into greater poverty. The pandemic has resulted in employment discrimination, social exclusion, gender-related inequalities and child labour. It impacts negatively on employment as it affects people in the most productive age groups (15-49). It results in low productivity and depleted human capital. It has challenged social security systems and threatened occupation safety and health among certain groups at risk such as migrant workers and their families and workers in the medical and transport sectors. The pandemic leads to an increase in labour costs because of low productivity, absenteeism, shortage of labour, fewer working hours and increased health costs, etc. Household savings are decreasing as resources are redirected to health costs and caring for the sick.

The ILO tripartite structure provides a mechanism for intensifying the response to HIV/AIDS. The Organisation is developing a Programme of Action in Africa to help combat the spread of HIV/AIDS and provide protection and support to its victims.

Promoting social dialogue

Social dialogue is a means to promote decent work for men and women and ensure the removal of gender-based inequities. The ILO tripartite structure offers a unique set-up for nurturing democratic life and promoting economic growth with social justice. But the participation and representation of women in the social dialogue process need to be improved.

Improving the representation of women in social dialogue structures

Social dialogue echoes the needs and aspirations of its constituents. Its relevance depends on whether all segments of society can make their voices heard. The low number of women in key positions in representative bodies acts as a brake on the advancement of gender equality issues and on improving the situation of women in the world of work. Issues such as sex discrimination, equal pay, work and family responsibilities including childcare, working-time arrangements and sexual harassment will only be put on the social dialogue agenda if enough women are parties to the dialogue. Gender policies and policies targeting women have to be constructed with women. There is, therefore, a pressing need to increase the participation of women in existing social dialogue structures - unions, employers and their associations - still overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Reaching out to new partnerships

There is also a need to open up the dialogue to new partnerships with actors beyond the traditional structures of social dialogue. At the national level, machineries for women's issues are often not included in social dialogue because they are not located in the labour ministry but in the ministry of health, the ministry for social affairs or in a completely separate administrative structure. At the local level, activist groups of civil society with a first hand knowledge of the problems and constraints of women could also make constructive contributions. We have seen that the informalization of employment has induced a fragmentation of the labour force and the multiplication of employment statuses. It is necessary to find innovative ways of reaching out to women and include in the dialogue unorganized workers, the self employed and employers in small enterprises.

The organizational and negotiating capacity of women need to be strengthened. Group organization enables its members to negotiate from a better position for equal treatment and protection; to draw public attention to and support for their needs and to participate in decisions affecting their employment opportunities; to network in order to advance their own strategic

interests. There are many success stories of mobilizing and training women in self employment, homebased production, in group dynamics and leadership. They have shown a number of distinct potentials: economic activities undertaken on a larger, collective and more viable basis; marketing and sales promotion; group access to credit; procuring, maintaining and managing common production facilities and workshops; organization of social support services; facilitation of marketing of products or delivery of services; and enhanced visibility and social recognition. The enhanced organizational and negotiating capacity of women has not only yielded positive outcomes in terms of a more equitable share between men and women of the opportunities and benefits of economic development, but more importantly it has helped overcome the causes of gender discrimination and women's vulnerability that, to a large extent, lie outside the labour market.

Conclusion

Gender cuts across all spheres of society: economic, social, political and cultural. Strategies to promote full and equal participation of women and men require a holistic approach. Interrelated problems cannot be tackled by sectoral solutions. Gender issues have so far been mainly addressed through sectoral policies, for example, by supporting micro-entreprises or targeting social welfare measures to women, but gender analysis has permeated less the domain of macroeconomic policy. Macroeconomic policies such as changes in fiscal policy, trade liberalization and deregulation programmes, industrial policy frameworks, national debt profiles, different monetary policy regimes and structural adjustment programmes have mostly been gender blind. Each of these has impacts on women, on their access to work, on their job security, on their job quality, on their incomes, on their personal development and on the well-being of their family. More needs to be done to mainstream gender considerations in high level policy.

More attention needs to be paid to both practical and strategic needs of women. Labour force participation is not only a means of earning a living and economic independence, but an integral part of women's self-perception and sense of identity. In today's societies the work collective is the most important social network. The link between the social and economic value of work and the conditions under which it is performed is at the heart of a strategy promoting decent work. And a widening understanding of this reality is itself a source of social progress - for example, a better understanding of gender inequalities in the experience of work is challenging the legitimacy of dominant models of development. A new development paradigm needs to be developed in which both economic and social reproduction is taken into account.

The 'Decent Work' agenda is the ILO's response to the opportunities and challenges of globalization. It highlights and addresses the global gap between economic growth and social development in an integrated manner and provides a crucial and central dimension, a way to build social standards into development and into effective participation in the international economy. This is where ILO can make a major contribution to shaping the new global architecture. But the goal of decent work for both men and women can only be achieved through a concerted and joint effort at the national, regional and international levels.

Within the UN system, there has been increasingly integrated follow-up to global UN conferences. Though some progress has been made in inter-agency collaboration, much remains to be achieved. A strong partnership among UN and other international agencies, with each bringing into full play their expertise in the field of their competence but within a coherent and integrated framework would add value to development programmes and their sustainability at the national level. While strengthening the existing partnerships, more efforts should be made to forge and expand new partnerships, involving all actors of civil society in a concerted endeavour to promote equality between men and women. Partnership among agencies and between

agencies, individually and collectively, and the actors of civil society is a key to the effective development and execution of common goals.

ANNEX: Priority Gender Issues in the Four Strategic Sectors of ILO Action

Priority Gender Issues in fundamental principles and rights at work

- An increasing number of governments have enacted legislation to comply with ILO standards, and in particular Conventions 100 and 111, but the gap between the *de jure* and the *de facto* situation of women is persistent. Based on these standards, the ILO calls for formal equality of rights as well as substantive equality.
- The promotion of other international labour standards, such as those concerning maternity protection, workers with family responsibilities, safety and health, part-time workers and homeworkers, and the organization of rural workers has been used by women, both inside and outside the labour market, to gain visibility and exert pressure for change.
- Equal access to productive resources.
- The Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and its follow-up reinforces the promotion of the fundamental right of gender equality. The gender perspective will be integrated into the follow-up process in reporting and technical cooperation activities.

Priority Gender Issues in Employment and Income generation

- Employability of women. Ensure equal access to training, to the acquisition of new skills in order to break occupational segregation by sex and enable women to benefit from new technologies.
- The eradication of poverty by addressing both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of employment opportunities for women. Pay special attention to the vulnerability of women at different stages of the life cycle. And combat trafficking in women and girls.
- Support to wage workers and the self-employed of the informal economy through innovative schemes.
- Support to women in the area of management development and entrepreneurship.
- The vulnerability of women to crises and the need to design specific responses which cater for the different needs of both men and women.

Priority Gender Issues in Social Protection

- In the current socio-economic context, the primary objective of social protection is to reduce insecurity in the world of work: to ensure safe and decent conditions of work, to prevent poverty and social exclusion, to maintain incomes and ensure adequate access to care and social services for all.
- Find solutions which eliminate discrimination in the application of the basic principles of social security, while extending coverage to those who are now excluded.
- Ensure that the conditions of work are safe, healthy and decent. Occupational safety and health policies to ensure protection for all workers' health, while taking into account the specific needs of each category of workers, both women and men. Of specific interest to women are: maternity protection, the elimination of sexual harassment and violence at the workplace, and improving the work conditions in hazardous industries.
- Develop practical measures to help men and women combine paid employment and care work and to support the access of women to paid work.
- To improve the governance and efficiency of social security systems. Every worker needs a minimum level of social and income security, yet conventional social security schemes have tended to penalize women. It is necessary to strengthen social protection mechanisms that promote equality between men and women both at home and in the labour market.

Priority Gender Issues in Social Dialogue

- Make gender equality issues visible on the agenda of social dialogue and that of tripartite institutions - governments, employers' organizations and trade unions.
- Mainstream gender in the work of labour ministries, government agencies, employers' organizations and trade unions.
- Outreach by the social partners to the informal sector, small enterprises and precarious workers to extend their representation. Build alliances with relevant women's organizations around programmes to promote gender equality
- Gender balance in membership and in leadership and representation functions of the social partners.

APPENDIX 1 : GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE ILO

1. ILO's first strategic budget, *Programme and Budget for 2000-01*, and the report entitled *Decent work*, submitted by the Director-General to the 87th International Labour Conference, identified gender as cutting across the four strategic objectives of the Organization namely promoting fundamental principles and rights at work; creating greater employment and income opportunities for women and men; enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection; and strengthening social dialogue. Tangible progress has been made in various domains.

2. Enhanced commitment to gender issues at the highest political level. Soon after taking office in March 1999, in a speech on the occasion of International Women's Day, the Director-General pledged a strong commitment to gender equality and expressed his intention to give high priority to "ensuring that the ILO is counted among the most progressive organizations in the field of gender equality". In the light of this strong commitment, efforts are reinforced in the following three areas:

- *Structure:* All sectors have developed and strengthened institutional arrangements to effectively mainstream gender in their work. Gender issues are being integrated into new and existing mechanisms for programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- *Substance:* Efforts are made to institutionalize accountability mechanisms and integrate gender equality concerns in all technical work, support and operational activities. This will create new analytical frameworks, enrich the knowledge base and improve the quality of products, services and information. More importance is attached to gender analysis and other tools, to promote gender equality in advisory services and technical cooperation.
- *Representation:* Measures are taken to improve the gender balance of Professional staff within the Organization. A target of 50 per cent of women among professional staff has been set, to be reached by the year 2010. Increasing efforts are made towards the promotion of female officials to senior and managerial positions. Career development opportunities for General Service staff will be improved and specific measures taken to create a family friendly working environment.

3. This process of policy formulation and strategic planning was considerably and visibly strengthened by the issuance of an internal circular on gender equality and mainstreaming in the International Labour Office in December 1999 and the approval of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming (*copies available upon request*) in the International Labour Office for its implementation.

4. The International Labour Conference and the Governing Body have also demonstrated enhanced commitment to gender equality concerns. Two informal meetings at ministerial level were held during the International Labour Conference on "More and Better Jobs for Women" in 1998 and "Let's Make Gender Equality a Reality" in 1999.

5. With gender defined as a cross-cutting issue, efforts are made to systematically incorporate gender concerns into the design and implementation of programmes, including technical cooperation activities. There has been a substantial increase in regular budgetary and extra-budgetary resources, so much so that the resources earmarked for gender issues in the technical sectors has grown by 156 per cent in the 2000-01 biennium, in comparison to the 1998-99 biennium. Provisional estimates of likely expenditure submitted to the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee at the Governing Body session in November 1999 amounts to approximately US\$12.3 million from the regular budget. This covers Professional staff, programme implementation costs such as technical missions, seminars, meetings, research and development costs. For extra-budgetary resources, an expected 10-12 per cent of US\$215 million estimated expenditure will be allocated to gender activities, i.e. around US\$23 million for the 2000-01 biennium.

6. The Bureau for Gender Equality has replaced the former Office of the Special Adviser on Women Workers' Questions and has been allocated more resources to cover two additional Professional staff members and extend its gender mainstreaming activities. The terms of

reference of the Gender Bureau have been revised to reflect the changed roles and responsibilities as a catalyst in the process of gender mainstreaming. Extra resources were also allocated to produce tools and guides to promote gender mainstreaming, including two new publications, *Gender: A partnership of Equals* and *ABC on Women Workers' Rights and Gender Equality*. Since 1997 three additional posts of senior gender specialists have been created in the regions, two in Asia (Manila and New Delhi) and one in Africa (Harare), bringing the total number of senior gender specialists for the regions to seven.

7. The new Office structure already shows an improvement in gender balance at the Directorate level. Latest figures reveal that 10 women have been promoted to P5; 6 to D1 and 2 to D2 between January 1999 and February 2000. The situation as of December 31, 1999 indicates a 1.6% increase of women in P5 positions, over December 1998; and an increase of 5.7% and 6.9% for women holding D1 and D2 positions respectively, since December 1998.

8. Efforts are being made to develop and strengthen institutional arrangements in the sectors, either in the form of a gender unit or a gender team, with senior management assuming the main responsibility for mainstreaming gender. A two pronged approach is taken: incorporating gender issues in all programmes and activities and designing gender-specific interventions, targeting women exclusively, men exclusively, or men and women together. Gender as a cross cutting issue requires the development of new analytical frameworks, improved coordination and flexible and creative implementation modalities. At the institutional level efforts are made towards the development of gender sensitive indicators, manuals, checklists and tools in order to effectively implement the gender mainstreaming strategy and improve the quality of ILO products, services and advocacy on gender issues. Increased efforts are also made to generate gender sensitive data and information.

9. A good example to cite is the Standards Department and the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) who engaged consultants to undertake in-depth gender assessment in all aspects of the work and supervision of international labour standards, technical advisory assistance, promotional activities and information, seminars, reports to the Governing Body, technical cooperation programmes, staff capacity to mainstream; to identify gender sensitive areas of concern; and to make recommendations on how to best develop a gender approach. The following evaluation criteria were used to guide the review: use of gender sensitive language; request, provision and use of data disaggregated by sex; explicit promotion of gender equality; inclusion of female and male experiences; and note of any differential impact on men or women (boys or girls). In carrying out their work the consultants worked with officials while collecting and analyzing information - thus providing individualized training sessions. The findings of this review exercise are to be incorporated into guidance material for staff use.

10. A series of activities were organized at headquarters and in the field to strengthen capacity building for ILO staff and constituents on gender issues. These activities were aimed at enhancing general awareness and the capacity to conduct gender analyses, as well as gender planning skills in technical areas and strengthening networking for exchanges of information and experience on gender mainstreaming. Extra resources, amounting to \$180,000, were allocated to capacity-building activities in the second half of 1999. One of the new characteristics of the capacity-building activities for ILO staff was that they increasingly covered practical needs for gender analysis in the areas of technical competence of the participants and the development of tools for gender mainstreaming. More than 1,200 ILO staff have been trained over the last few years. In addition, various technical programmes and projects set up gender capacity-building activities for constituents. Training on gender issues has been provided to constituents in more

than 20 countries in all regions. The experience and lessons learned from these capacity-building activities are being evaluated and consolidated to facilitate the exchange of experience.

11. At its 276th Session (November 1999) the Governing Body decided to hold a *symposium* on "Women 2000" during its 277th Session. A one-day symposium on *Decent Work for Women* was held on 24 March 2000. It demonstrated the Governing Body's strong support to the preparations of *Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace in the Twenty-first Century*. The symposium was an important event highlighting the links between the ILO's global agenda on decent work for men and women and the strategic objectives set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. The purpose of the symposium was to enhance the effectiveness of the ILO's decent work programme and gender mainstreaming in accelerating the implementation of the Platform for Action of the Beijing Conference. Its focus was on (i) the importance of promoting decent work for women as a matter of human rights, social justice and economic and social development; (ii) how to promote decent work for women through the ILO's means of action, good practices and recommendations for future action. The symposium was opened by the Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia. Guest speakers included Ms. Angela King, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Ms. Bina Agarwal, Professor of Economics at the Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi, India. There was a tripartite panel on promoting decent work for women through social dialogue. The presentations and discussion of the Symposium centred around how to promote equal opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. A strong common understanding emerged and many recommendations were presented for future initiatives. A report on the Symposium covering the various aspects of decent work for women is being prepared and will be available in autumn 2000.

APPENDIX 2: ILO's contribution to the implementation of the Platform of Action through its operational activities

1. ILO's operational activities help its tripartite constituents to implement the 'Decent Work' agenda by responding to their needs and concerns at the national and regional levels. ILO means of action are wide ranging: standard-setting and monitoring, technical cooperation, advisory services, capacity-building, meetings and other promotional activities, research and publications, networking and dissemination of information. All these activities generate information and experience which enrich and strengthen the Organisation's knowledge base. In addition, technical cooperation activities contribute to the identification of appropriate and successful policies and measures which can be replicated or adapted in other programmes and projects.

2. Within the framework of the new ILO gender policy, systematic efforts are being made and specific steps taken to mainstream gender into ILO technical cooperation activities. The gender mainstreaming strategy consists of two integrated and complementary components: (i) gender concerns are 'mainstreamed' into all programmes and projects; and (ii) targeted interventions, directed to either women, men or both, are designed to narrow existing gaps in gender equality and overcome the consequences of past discrimination.

3. Since Beijing, demand for support in the field of gender equality at work by ILO constituents has been steadily growing, which attests of the positive impact of gender awareness-raising activities and mainstreaming efforts. ILO approaches gender equality in the world of work as a matter of human rights and social justice. And it is critical for sustainable development, the effective use of human resources, and family and child welfare. Both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of employment are addressed, as well as the empowerment of women. Current targeted assistance focuses on employment creation and poverty alleviation, on

promoting the quality of employment, on the provision of social protection to specific groups of women workers, as well as on combatting the trafficking of women and children. Activities related to women workers' rights also receive an important attention. Many targeted activities take a holistic approach and touch simultaneously on various critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. Some selected operational activities in the areas of the Beijing Platform related to the ILO mandate are listed below. Emphasis is put on the major lessons learned from these projects.

Women and poverty

4. Poverty alleviation projects continue to be formulated in a developmental perspective, but an increasing number aim at mitigating the social consequences of economic reforms and restructuring, financial and economic crisis, conflicts and natural disasters. There has been considerable flexibility in redirecting the substantive or geographical focus of certain programmes, for example to include women affected by the crisis in Asia as a special target group. Activities in post-conflict situations have broadened their scope and shifted their emphasis from ex-combatants towards households, offering packages that include women and children.

5. The global programme *Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion (STEP)* promotes the extension of innovative social protection measures for the most vulnerable groups and aims at reaching men and women workers insufficiently protected by existing social services. The main lesson learned from STEP's activities is that unless women are included at the earliest stage of the planning process, they become increasingly invisible at each subsequent stages. STEP approaches the inclusion of women and gender concerns by ensuring that all staff are gender sensitive, by identifying and constructing relevant achievement indicators for gender related activities, and finally, by fully monitoring the gender mainstreaming process.

6. In the light of the ongoing feminization of poverty, the ILO has developed and launched a capacity-building programme on *Gender, Poverty and Employment* based on poverty eradication strategies with the triple objectives of enhancing women's access to quality employment opportunities; strengthening their bargaining and negotiating power; and devising innovative social protection strategies, especially for less-organized workers such as those in the informal economy and home workers.

Education and training of women

7. Over the last two decades, school enrolment rates of girls and women have risen in almost all countries, and female students have demonstrated their ability to perform as well as, and even better than, their male counterparts. However, academic performance by itself has not been translated correspondingly into equal employment and training opportunities in the labour market. Though education and training can give access to better jobs, it has not been sufficient to break the barriers of occupational segregation or gender disparity in wages. Widening the education and training choices of women, ensuring access to new jobs based on new technologies, facilitating the access of women to workplace-based training and lifelong learning programmes are all key factors for gender equality.

8. In Latin America, a regional programme on *Strengthening Technical Education and Vocational Training* for low-income women, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank, started in 1998. It combines the systematization and dissemination of information and materials on the topic; technical advisory services for the national vocational training institutes involved, on issues such as curriculum revision, vocational guidance, and gender training for

technical staff; and cooperation amongst relevant ILO units and institutions dealing with gender and employment issues at the national level, especially with the productive sectors.

Women and the economy

9. Economic changes have restructured global labour markets and opened up new opportunities and new challenges. In spite of their increasing participation in the labour force and some positive developments, the majority of women workers continue to face persistent barriers in the labour market. The increase in the quantity of women's employment has not been matched by improvements in the quality of their employment. Women are mainly found in low paid, low- or semi-skilled atypical forms of wage work or self-employment. Often poorly protected, they are more vulnerable to increasing labour market insecurity.

10. National action plans have been formulated in several countries under the *International Programme on More and Better Jobs for Women*. They identify priority areas for legislative reform, and employment promotion and social protection measures. Some of these activities are aimed at ensuring that women's productive employment leads to the reduction of child labour, combatting the trafficking of women and children into exploitative forms of labour, and bringing overall improvements in family welfare and poverty alleviation.

11. An interregional gender mainstreamed programme for workers in export processing zones has been developed since 1996. This programme provides policy advice and builds capacity amongst government agencies, workers' and employers' organizations at zone and enterprise level. It has demonstrated that without adopting a perspective gender, improvements in working conditions, enterprise performance, human resource development and labour relations are unlikely. The social and working environment of workers, and in particularly of women workers, affects productivity as well as impinges on a sense of fulfilment. In late 1998 a subregional project started in Central America on organizing women workers in export processing zones, aimed at improving working and living conditions in this sector. It applies the same approach to build a consensus amongst all the stakeholders at the country or zone level that respect for fundamental principles and rights at work will lead to a win-win situation.

12. An interregional programme on *Employment Promotion for Women in the Context of Economic Reform and Restructuring* addresses, since 1993, the impact of economic globalization on women workers. The programme has improved the awareness, understanding and knowledge of governments, employers' and workers' organizations, women's associations and other non-governmental organizations in relation to the gender-differentiated impacts of restructuring on employment. Gender was incorporated into the policy debate and on the agenda of social safety nets thanks to a participatory approach which required wide support from all stakeholders.

13. A programme on *Home Workers in the Global Economy* was launched in South-East Asia in 1996, and later in Latin America. The programme's strategy combined three inter-related goals, namely the enhancement of home workers' productivity and the promotion of both their social protection and organization-building. In spite of different national conditions and policy contexts, the pursuance of this integrated approach made it possible for all home workers to move on and engage in other activities.

14. Technical cooperation activities that aim at enhancing women's employment and income opportunities are more likely to succeed if they adopt multifaceted strategies addressing various aspects of women's economic activities. The core elements of these strategies were training and extension services, organizing women and strengthening the capacity of governments and NGOs to provide women with necessary support services. Enhancing women's employment is a social,

institutional and economic process which requires not only action by individual women or women's groups, but also reforms of institutions, policies and laws. It may involve changes in socio-cultural practices and the relationships between the target group and other social groups. Projects therefore need a time frame of several years within which to design and implement their strategies.

15. Tripartite commissions on gender equality in the world of work have started to function in the four MERCOSUR countries and Chile since 1994. The commissions act as advocates in their own institutions as well as national advisory bodies on gender and employment issues. Within the framework of the programme mentioned in paragraph 15, a tripartite task force was created in Tanzania in 1996 and then formalized in a national forum on gender, labour and employment issues by the Ministry of Labour in early 1998.

Women in power and decision-making

16. More new opportunities have been opened for qualified women to occupy lower and middle-level management posts. Yet inherent discrimination exists in the organizational structures and processes of enterprises, as well as in society, which prevent them from reaching the top positions. The nature of women's career paths is a major factor blocking their progress, as well as the lack of access to the necessary networks and the need to harmonize career and family responsibilities. Women's limited access to management jobs also reflects the cumulative effect of labour market gender inequalities.

17. The training activities carried out through the interregional project on *Promotion of Women in Private Sector Activities through Employers' Organizations* have helped women entrepreneurs and those working in companies develop self-esteem and confidence and encouraged them to take on challenges, to compete for promotion. The project also drew attention to the core ILO Conventions on equality issues in employment and advocated the ratification of these conventions among national employers' organizations.

18. Projects addressing the empowerment of women workers through trade unions have concentrated on a few combined strategies: awareness raising among both male and female trade union leaders; building organizational capacity; focussing on the training of women activists to take leadership roles; and ensuring that women participate in and benefit from all activities launched by the project. This was the case, for example, in a regional project on *Workers' Education Assistance to strengthen Trade Union Action on Women Workers in view of eliminating Child Labour*, implemented between 1995 and 1999 in selected South-East Asian countries.

Human rights of women

19. ILO standards addressing gender-specific issues have a long history. From the 1950s onwards there has been a shift of emphasis from protective concerns towards a gender equality perspective. The Report of the Director-General *Decent Work* points to three priorities for ILO action in the field of human rights and work: the promotion of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, increased efforts to eliminate child labour, and renewed work on standards.

20. The project on *Training and Information Dissemination on Women Workers' Rights*, initiated in 1996 and completed in 1999, operated in ten countries (China, Egypt, Hungary, Mali, India, El Salvador, Suriname, Ukraine, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe). The project showed the need to build a knowledge base on the rights of women workers in ILO member states and partner organisations

in the light of the International Labour Standards. A wide tripartite consensus on priority issues concerning the promotion of women in employment was achieved. This provided a useful contribution to the design and implementation of the national action plans following up the Beijing Conference.

Women and the environment

21. Working conditions and the working environment are sources of hazards for both men and women. The different response of men and women workers to health and environmental hazards is essentially due to work-related risks in specific types of work and the multiple roles they play in society. In general, working women undertake tasks with a lower risk of occupational accidents, but they are more exposed to specific health risks (for example, exposure to pesticides in agriculture and chemicals in micro-electronic industries).

22. Emphasis is placed on safety in hazardous occupations, the fight against occupational diseases, and improving the working environment. Various national and industry-level activities are aimed at improving working conditions and productivity in small and medium-sized enterprises in branches of activity where women workers predominate. Activities such as awareness-raising, training-of-trainers courses and industry-level workshops for entrepreneurs were carried out in Asia (Mongolia and the Philippines), Africa (Ghana, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, Tanzania and Uganda) and Central and South America (Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Haiti and Uruguay).

The girl child

23. Working girls deserve special attention, as they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and are more likely to be denied the right to education. The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has carried out projects targeting girls in bonded labour, prostitution, domestic work and manufacturing. IPEC's goal is not just the removal of individual children from work in which they are exploited, but the long-term goal that will be achieved when new generations of children are effectively prevented from entering the labour market.

24. IPEC's approach is to build a nationwide social alliance among all partners including working children, to implement programmes which can be successful in different environments and lay the ground for national ownership and sustainability. IPEC mixes preventive and curative solutions with immediate focus on the worst forms of child labour. Tackling problems from a gender perspective includes that key partners have an improved understanding of the special situation of the girl child, as well as of the linkages between child labour and the employment of women.

25. Some lessons learned from the implementation of operational activities

- -Any programme or project needs to be sharply focussed with clear and well defined objectives and priorities. But as gender issues are interconnected individual priorities have to be approached from a holistic and integrated perspective.
- -New frameworks and methodology for gender analysis are needed to include neglected issues and reflect changes. For example, not enough consideration has given to the link between social reproduction and productive activities, or to new emerging actors and stakeholders from civil society. Innovative and participatory methods should be adopted.

- -There is a need to generate gender sensitive data and information for gender analysis, policy formulation and project design. Collected statistics should adequately reflect the different situations of men, women and children and be disaggregated by sex and age.
- -Capacity building in how to promote gender equality for participants and project officers as well as strengthening pools of expertise for gender mainstreaming and gender specific interventions need to be developed. This will raise gender awareness, foster advocacy and generate a demonstration effect through networking.
- -Identify and disseminate good practices. Valuable lessons can be learned from both success stories, failures and solutions to overcome problems and set-backs. The replicability of a project into another context or region needs to be carefully scrutinized.
- -Follow-up of programmes and projects is essential for their sustainability. Adequate tools, including indicators and targets, for monitoring the effects and evaluating the impacts of projects and programmes need to be developed and applied.