



## 12th African Regional Meeting

Johannesburg, South Africa, 11–14 October 2011

AFRM.12/P.3

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### Special focus discussion

#### Women's social and economic empowerment and gender equality

##### Why is women's empowerment and gender equality important for the ILO?

The ILO promotes women's economic empowerment and gender equality as key development goals – as asserted in international labour Conventions and by the Millennium Development Goals. There is also evidence that women's empowerment and gender equality can contribute to increased economic growth. Gender inequality in Africa is estimated to have reduced GDP growth in the region by almost 1 per cent each year.<sup>1</sup> Finally, women's economic empowerment can impact upon poverty reduction, as the pattern of consumption in the household tends to be more child-focused and oriented to meeting basic needs. For example, a study in South Africa showed that an increase in women's income was accompanied by more money being spent on children's education.<sup>2</sup>

##### What are the obstacles to women's economic empowerment?

Despite some noticeable progress, African women continue to face gender-based barriers to successfully participating in the workplace, namely:

- **Discriminatory employment policies and recruitment practices.** Women continue to suffer discrimination at work. In Senegal and Mali, for example, women earn 66 per cent of what men earn from similar work.<sup>3</sup> However, there is an increasing intolerance of discrimination. In South Africa, there is even a proposal to enforce equal pay for work of equal value; and fining companies up to 10 per cent of their annual turnover for non-compliance.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Division for Women, *International Women's Day Backgrounder*, New York, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> A.R. Quisumbing and J.A. Maluccio, "Resources at marriage and intra-household allocation: Evidence from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Indonesia and South Africa", *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 2003, pp. 283–327.

<sup>3</sup> R. Hausmann, L.D. Tyson and S. Zahidi, *Global Gender Gap Report 2010*, World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2010.

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- **An unequal share of family and household responsibilities.** To greater and lesser degrees, women are expected to, and do, take on the majority of childcare and household responsibilities. A recent World Bank study in Nigeria found that women do virtually all the childcare and an average of three-quarters of the household tasks. However, the same study found anecdotal evidence that middle class young professional men whose partners work are taking a more active role.<sup>4</sup>
  - **Lack of control over productive resources such as land and property.** Precise data is lacking, but it is estimated that women hold the title to less than 2 per cent of land in Africa. Clearly, not owning one's business premises or farm is a major impediment to economic advancement for women.
  - **Women remain a minority voice in leadership positions.** Research on women in leadership positions of trade unions in eight African countries found that women are discouraged by negative perceptions of their leadership abilities, and that while "gender equality" is almost always official policy, it is not internalized by the mostly male leadership.<sup>5</sup>
  - **Women are segregated into low paid, low status forms of work.** Studies have shown that while there are many women entrepreneurs running micro-enterprises, chiefly in the informal economy, women are not well represented in medium and large business. The larger a business is, the less likely that it is owned by a woman.<sup>6</sup>

## **What is the ILO doing to advance women's economic empowerment in Africa?**

The ILO seeks to overcome the abovementioned constraints via the inclusion of a gender dimension in all programmes and policies; and through women-specific interventions to redress longstanding inequalities. According to the Resolution on gender equality at the heart of decent work (adopted by the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference, June 2009), gender equality must be promoted across all four strategic objectives of the ILO, namely: fundamental principles and rights at work; employment; social protection; and social dialogue and tripartism.

## **Fundamental principles and rights at work**

While many ILO Conventions are important to the promotion of gender equality in the world of work, four Conventions are of particular relevance: the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156); and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

Conventions Nos 100 and 111 have both been ratified by 50 African member States, but implementation remains a challenge everywhere. Consequently, most of the ILO's work in respect of these Conventions is devoted to monitoring and supporting

<sup>4</sup> C.O. Chukuezi, "Women participation in household labour in Nigeria", *European Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2010, pp. 269–304.

<sup>5</sup> African Labour Research Network, *Women in Trade Unions in Africa*, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> The Uganda Business Register (UBOS 2003) indicated that only 15 per cent of businesses with 50 or more employees were woman owned, as compared to 65 per cent of businesses with four or less employees.

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implementation, and making recommendations for improvements. For example, in 2010 the ILO commissioned research on the application of Conventions Nos 100 and 111 in South Africa, and a reform of the Labour Relations Act is now being proposed to enforce equal pay for work of equal value, and fining companies up to 10 per cent of their annual turnover for non-compliance. With support from the ILO, gender sensitive employment policies have been enacted in the United Republic of Tanzania and Liberia to bring their national policies more in synch with their obligations under the two Conventions.

Conventions Nos 156 and 183 have far less ratifications. Only Mali and Morocco have ratified the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). Meanwhile, only Ethiopia, Guinea, Mauritius and Niger have ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). Nonetheless, the ILO has supported constituents to conduct national studies, and develop advocacy platforms on the economic and social benefits of better work–family balance and maternity protection. Following one such campaign in Angola, the government considered revising its maternity protection provisions to entitle women workers to 90 days of maternity leave; to breastfeeding breaks; and to an extra day of annual leave for each child under 14.

## **Employment**

The Women’s Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE) programme has been active all over Africa. In Lesotho, as a result of ILO’s WEDGE programme, 1,860 women have become members of Women’s Entrepreneur Associations, while in Malawi membership of the National Association of Business Women grew from 550 to 2,200 in 2010. With ILO support, many African countries have an annual Month of the Woman Entrepreneur, a gala of trade fairs, fashion shows, marches through city centres and advocacy through the media to promote women entrepreneurs. The Cairo Platform for Action for the Development of Women’s Entrepreneurship in Africa (October 2009) and the Women Entrepreneurs Forum will, in partnership with the African Development Bank, continue to promote the good practices of WEDGE in Africa.

## **Social protection**

The ILO works with constituents to promote a minimum social protection floor of essential social services and income security for all women and men. It strives to ensure that measures to promote occupational safety and health, to combat HIV and AIDS, and to protect the workplace rights of migrant workers. For example, eight countries in Africa will have explicitly addressed gender equality in national or sectoral workplace policies on HIV and AIDS by the end of 2011, resulting from gender analyses undertaken to inform these policies. The ILO is working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Mali and Senegal to extend microinsurance to women and their families using remittances sent by their migrant husbands. Throughout 2010 and 2011 – in support of the preparations on setting a new international labour standard on domestic workers – there was a particular emphasis on social protection for domestic workers, who are predominantly women workers.

## **Social dialogue**

The ILO strives to build the capacity of governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations to promote gender equality in the workplace, to ensure that gender equality is on the agenda in tripartite discussions on the world of work, and to promote women’s representation in decision-making positions. The ILO has undertaken studies on gender equality and social dialogue in South Africa, Rwanda and Nigeria and has engaged in

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capacity building in gender issues for trade unions in a number of countries in the African region. Technical support was provided to ITUC–Africa for capacity building in gender mainstreaming in employment issues and in preparation for discussions during the committee on gender equality at the heart of decent work at the 2009 International Labour Conference.

## **The participatory gender audit**

GENDER uses participatory gender audits (PGAs) to assist its constituents and ILO units to promote equality between women and men in their staffing, structures and in the substance of their work. A gender audit uses a self-assessment approach and takes into account both objective data – gathered through a review of the unit’s internal and public documents – as well as perceptions of staff, management and clients on gender issues through interviews and participatory workshops. Based on the information obtained, the facilitators present a report making practical, concise recommendations for how the unit or organization can improve its attention to gender issues. Since its inception in 2001, PGAs of ILO offices have been undertaken in Abuja, Addis Ababa, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Harare, Pretoria and Yaoundé; PGAs of UN Country Teams were undertaken, with the ILO’s support, in Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania; and PGAs of constituent agencies have taken place in Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. A training of ITUC Africa in the PGA methodology has also taken place in Togo.

## **Partnerships with the UN**

The ILO has been participating directly in the UN joint programmes on gender in Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Uganda and is contributing to the economic empowerment components of UNDAFs. Moreover, the ILO recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN Women.

## **Suggested questions for discussion**

1. How, with the emphasis on the economic crisis and austerity measures, can we ensure women’s social and economic empowerment, and gender equality issues, remain on the national and global policy agenda?
2. How can we ensure that women’s rights and gender equality become integral components of the campaign for social justice?
3. How, and to what extent, should the ILO pursue the business case for gender equality?