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## **More and Better Human Resource Development for Women**

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## MORE AND BETTER HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN

Annually the meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the Annual International Women's Day provides an opportunity to focus on the employability and life issues that women face all over the world. In 1995, the heads of the world's nations made commitments in Beijing, China to ensure girls' and women's lives and their status and dignity improve. However, as the Commission and other international organizations observe, the lack of sufficient investments in girls' and women's skills and knowledge expansion, lifelong learning and health worldwide is devastating to all in a world increasingly dominated by information and communication technology and global competition.

Equality for women and men in more and better jobs makes the most of human talents and potentials, promotes worker morale, reduces labour turnover, improves the socially responsible image of companies and means better business performance. The elimination of gender discrimination in respect to education, employment and occupation is embodied into the U.N.'s human rights principles and the ILO standards on the Conditions of Work and is critical to achieving the UN's Millennium goals to eliminate poverty worldwide.

The International Labour Organization notes that globalization has created unprecedented economic opportunities as well as deepened social inequalities and personal insecurities. Both men and women have been affected. With the growing number of female-headed families (due to conflicts and societal changes) and the gender inequalities that persist, it is women and children who overwhelmingly suffer the most:

- ∞ With 54 % of working age women in the labor force as compared to over 80% male participation, the world is not making the most of its female talents and potentials.
- ∞ Half of the world's population is in sex-stereotyped occupations with women dominating those occupations that are the lowest paying and have poorest working conditions. More women and men are gaining paid work but not having better jobs. In developed countries, most new employment is in part-time jobs, while in developing countries, women have gone into the informal sector and home-based work.
- ∞ Globally, women earn 20-30 % less than men. Their families suffer.

According to the ILO, across all professions, women face barriers to progress. Says the ILO, "Family responsibilities play a major role in whether or not women accept promotion and seek top jobs. The way work is organized is not always compatible with raising children. Some women also seek to avoid the impact of long working hours, stress and the prevalence of aggressiveness and authoritativeness that can be found in the top ranks."

Some women have breached organizational "glass walls and ceilings," but worldwide only 1 percent hold chief executive positions. The daily challenge of balancing family responsibilities with work leads some employers to consider women less able, and women still have to work harder to prove themselves, or adapt to "male" working styles. What's more, women face isolation, limited access to mentoring and female role models, sexual harassment, and are often excluded from training and informal networks vital to career development. Women are increasingly migrating, both legally and illegally because of war and poverty. However, along with children, they are the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. More women are creating their own businesses, which are important sources of employment for community members. However, the policy, regulatory and institutional environments are often unfriendly to women entrepreneurs.

According to the World Bank, well-educated women have better educated and healthier children and their societies benefit. For example, a one-year increase in the schooling of all adult females in a country is

associated with an increase in GDP per capita of around \$700. Additionally, female and male life expectancy increases 1 year and a more competent workforce is better able to function in an age of advancing technology and globalization. Also, children's labor force participation decreases by 1.4 percentage points. Providing girls with an education boosts economic productivity, lowers maternal and infant mortality rates and reduces poverty. According to the World Bank, "Advancing girls' education is key to making that a reality...Investment in girls' education is one of the best investments a country can make." This also refers to increasing education and training for women. (See: World Bank at [www.worldbank.org/gender](http://www.worldbank.org/gender))

Fortunately, there are many positive developments that are emerging to address these challenges. International organizations, such as the ILO and the World Bank, are working to enunciate the needs and exemplary policies for such developments. They are expanding income opportunities for women entrepreneurs by improving their business skills and access to resources. National governments and business and community partners are enunciating non-discriminatory principles and laws. Some businesses are undertaking strategies that debunk the myths surrounding women's capabilities and provide family-friendly policies (such as: parental leave and child and elder care); improve access to training, and install strong mentoring systems to encourage female staff retention as a key means to improve productivity. Some young men seek to have more active roles in child care and home responsibilities.

HRD has the means to assist policy makers, planners and managers to create discrimination-free environments. These means are:

- ∞ Inform employers and clients about the challenges and the societal commitments being made worldwide and the positive strategies to overcome these difficulties. Demonstrate the win-win outcomes for all.
- ∞ Influence the creation of appropriate organization policies and practices.
- ∞ Help prepare employee orientation on rights and responsibilities for discrimination-free working environments.
- ∞ Conduct research to identify "best policies and practices" from organizations and world-wide sources and establish a computerized information site and other means to share the results.
- ∞ Help develop, design and conduct organizational and community surveys to assess progress towards targets and assist in improvement efforts.
- ∞ Provide direct assistance in recruitment, skills training, group organization, access to resources, and support services and facilities, etc.- to help create employment and income earning opportunities.
- ∞ Build community partnerships for training and life-long learning.
- ∞ Ensure that women are among the candidates for executive and managerial positions and receive appropriate training prior to and after and are part of informal networks.
- ∞ Ensure that in training programs women are included and are encouraged to participate and succeed, for example, by providing scholarships and child care.
- ∞ Promote small business education and opportunities.
- ∞ Ensure that women are encouraged to join and become active in professional associations.

More information about these and other initiatives to empower women and promote gender equality is available at: [www.ilo.org/gender](http://www.ilo.org/gender).

However, a major concern remains about the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in certain communities and countries, especially among women and children, noted Mr. Koochiro Matsuura, Director-General, United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Women's lack of rights and power with respect to household income, property and life choices is facilitating the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, prevention education should be part of the learning experiences in and out of school for all persons. For maximum impact, it should be linked to access to information and resources

that help to minimize the risks of HIV infection. In many of the hardest-hit countries, educated women are at the forefront of community mobilization against HIV/AIDS. (For additional information, see the UNESCO website at: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org))

Achieving the goals of *Education for All*, notably the world-wide commitments that focus on gender equality in education and training is a vital contribution. Ultimately, empowerment through education contributes to building better societies and relationships based on gender equality and mutual respect.

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