

# **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION**

## **ECOSOC High-Level Segment 2002**

### **Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast on “Gender mainstreaming in human resources development including in the areas of health and education”**

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Better health and education of women and men go hand in hand, with one reinforcing progress in the other. They facilitate the development of capacities, knowledge acquisition, empowerment and participation, are fundamental to the eradication of poverty, and the achievement of social development, gender equality and long-term economic growth.

Education and training of women has been at the top of the agenda of the four United Nations world conferences on women, yet substantial disparities in educational opportunities and achievement persist. Women's different and unequal access to and use of basic health resources, and unequal opportunities for the protection, promotion and maintenance of their health, also remains a major concern. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by 169 States, covers both areas, as do the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of recent global conferences and summits.

The Millennium Declaration contains specific goals on girls' and women's education and health. It identified the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development. The road map towards the implementation of the Millennium Declaration provides strategies for moving this agenda forward, including greater efforts in the areas of maternal mortality, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and gender sensitivity in education, as does the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative launched by the Secretary-General in April 2000 at the Dakar World Education Forum.

Public policies and international cooperation to enhance human resources development as a basis for achieving identified goals, including those of the Millennium Declaration, are incomplete, and may even be counterproductive, if gender-based differences are not explicitly addressed at institutional, individual and household level. Any successful approach to human resources development must ensure adequate responses to the wider societal patterns of discrimination and disadvantage that shape the opportunities, resources and options available to individual women and men. Health and education systems in particular must actively support gender equality goals, and should thus explicitly promote gender equality as a contribution to development.

#### **Challenges in ensuring the integration of gender perspectives in human resources development:**

- Lack of awareness, or "gender blindness", on the part of policy- and decision-makers with regard to gender-based differences in access and opportunities, leading to gender bias in decisions related to education and health, including budgets;
- Insufficient attention to gender equality goals in human resources development;
- Lack of explicit attention to gender perspectives in policies and strategies;

- Lack of, or insufficient, gender-specific data and information for the development of gender-sensitive policies;
- Insufficient institutional capacity to integrate gender perspectives in human resources development policies;
- Weak institutional links between national machineries for the advancement of women and Government ministries responsible for education, health, and human resources development;
- Gender stereotypes and biases in education (curricula, teaching materials, etc) and health systems (quality and appropriateness of care, research focus, etc);
- The low number of women in positions of decision-making in the education and health sectors.

**Proposed issues for discussion:**

Concrete steps are needed to address worsening situations, to remove biases and obstacles, and ensure responsiveness of human resources policies to gender equality goals, and to accelerate achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women. To that end, particular attention could be focused on the following issues:

- *Institutional capacity building*: what are some of the good practices that could serve as examples for strengthening cooperation between national machineries for the advancement of women and sector ministries, and how can such cooperation enhance the capacity of sector ministries for gender-sensitive policy development?
- *Millennium Declaration Goals* in the area of education and health: how are national implementation processes linked to the implementation of the actions spelled out in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of the General Assembly?
- *Resources*: What are the main considerations in resource allocations for health and education? What role is given to gender equality goals among these considerations?
- *Information and communication technologies (ICTs)*: What steps are being taken to ensure that new technologies effectively support human resources development and gender equality goals?
- *Opportunities and achievements*: Given the differential achievement levels for women/girls, and men/boys in regard to education and health status, what are some of the successful steps being taken to remedy these differences?
- *Development cooperation and the role of the United Nations system*: How can better synergies be achieved between support for human resources development and gender equality?