

Quality education for girls and decent work for women – from the classroom to the workplace

Contribution of Education International (EI), Public Services International (PSI), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

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Delivered by Nadine Molloy

Honourable Ministers of government, Colleagues; trade union and NGO representatives,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this important dialogue on education and Science & Tech training for women and girls, and their linkages with career paths and decent work. I am here today representing 200 million workers, of which 40 % are women, organized within Education International, Public Services international and the International Trade Union Confederation.

We offer our congratulations to Ms. Michelle Bachelet and wish her and UN Women a smooth journey forward in implementing this very important mandate. The trade union movement offers its support and active assistance.

To be sustainable, policies to advance women and girls' participation in Sc & Tech, and to support their transition to decent work must operate within an holistic framework. They must address the full range of development challenges and structural discriminations hampering the achievement of gender equality.

All countries are faced with the challenge of achieving sustainable economic growth in a globalized world where technological and scientific knowledge are key to progress. We know that **investment in quality public services** is a key driver of development and necessary to achieve gender equality. Trade unions have grave concerns with the reductions to budgets supporting public services which governments are undertaking in response to the current economic crisis. If the Millennium Development (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals are to be achieved, investments in the public sector, especially education and training, **must** be increased, not decreased.

Persistent gender inequalities in education systems, in the school to work transition, and in working life need to be addressed. Denying women opportunities for full participation results in the loss of a valuable resource pool, much needed for contributing to the shaping of a gender-inclusive, people-centred, knowledge economy and democratic society; and it is a denial of women's fundamental rights. Exclusions and discriminations begin early, and are perpetuated and exacerbated along the continuum from school to working life.

True, strategies to improve access to education have been put in place in many countries. These have resulted in increased enrolment, and progress towards gender parity in primary school. High **drop-out rates** are still prevalent, especially for girls, and especially in secondary education, which is key for empowering girls. Drop-out rates are clearly associated with poverty, and also the related phenomenon of **child labour**. Girls face additional challenges because of the HIV epidemic, work in the home, and also of vulnerable, at risk employment in the entertainment industry or as domestic workers. When education is of sufficient quality, when girls are safe, fed, and pay no fees, parents will send them to school.

Achieving quality primary and secondary education and ensuring universal access are key to overcoming these development challenges and structural discriminations. Positive, safe, and welcoming learning environments are key. Policies need to be formulated in a gender-inclusive way and along three major axes:

- Improving the curriculum, methodologies, learning resources and career guidance to ensure equal opportunities, relevance to learners; to motivate lifelong learning, and to provide good transition to the world of work; Portrayal of men and women in non-traditional roles must be **included**, and stereotypes **excluded**.

- Improving the learning and physical environment, for accessibility, safety and security, including sanitary facilities, and for making buildings and technical equipment accessible and welcoming to girls;
- Improving the cadre of teachers in quantity and quality, especially in Science and Technology, through recruitment, pre and in-service teacher education and training, adequate remuneration, manageable teaching and learning conditions. Including female teachers as role models is also critical.

Gender equality in education cannot be achieved without the commitment and active effort of teachers and school managers. Gender sensitivity training must be a core part of teacher training, not only to change attitudes that perpetuate gender stereotypes but also to enable teachers to encourage girls, to empower them, to advise them. Incentives and mentoring works well for students and teachers alike.

Such core policies serve to create the enabling environment for girls' success. Where girls gain access, they achieve. Clearly, increasing numbers of women are completing university level programmes in S&T and engineering, but this is not being **translated to equal career chances and salaries**. After initial entry, opportunities for career advancement are minimal, and retention is poor.

A high level of vertical segregation has been noted, with women concentrated in the lower echelons of the occupational ladder, facing barriers that hinder advancement to senior research and managerial positions or professorships. Attrition rates for girls and women have been noted across the school to work continuum in S&T fields, but are particularly marked in the university to work transition.

A mismatch between educational attainment for women on the one hand, and career advancement and job remuneration on the other, as compared with men is clearly evident; and pay inequity remains persistent.

The **normative framework** necessary to support core policies already exists. :

- The Beijing Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- Key ILO Conventions: the Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No 111), the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No 183).

These can serve to overcome the full range of development challenges and gender inequalities that impede the smooth transition from the classroom into the career path and the decent workplace. The framework must now be systematically applied. Adequately funded strategic action is urgently needed to implement these policy frameworks.

EI, ITUC and PSI call on Member States at the CSW55 to introduce and strengthen policy interventions that will overcome the structural discriminations and barriers affecting the life chances of girls and women in terms of quality education and training that prepare them and enhance their opportunities for productive employment and decent work, life long learning, and full participation as citizens in democratic and socially just societies.

Thank You.