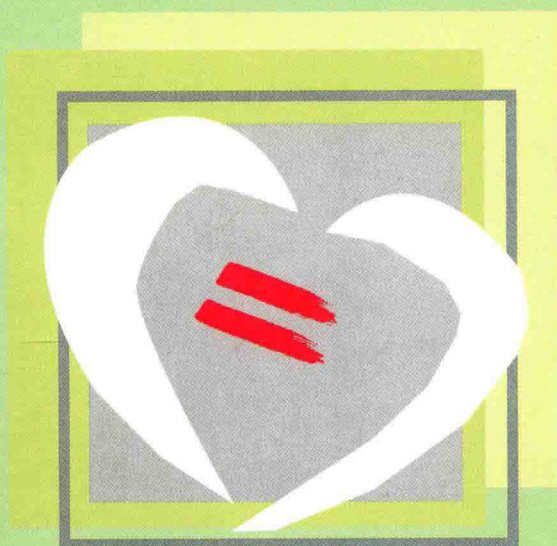




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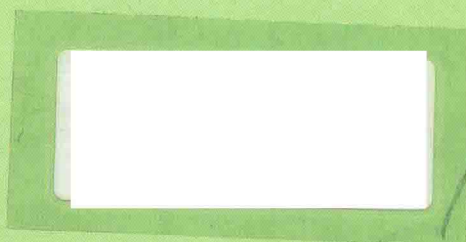
**Report VI**

# Gender equality at the heart of decent work



**International  
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Conference**

**98th Session 2009**



**Report VI**

# **Gender equality at the heart of decent work**

**Sixth item on the agenda**

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## Executive summary

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This report has three aims: reviewing the ILO's progress in assisting constituents to achieve gender equality in the world of work; highlighting its current efforts to implement International Labour Conference (ILC) resolutions and Governing Body decisions on promoting gender equality and mainstreaming it in the Decent Work Agenda; and providing background for constituents to chart a strategic course for future work. The context of the current financial and economic crisis has made the analysis of successful initiatives especially relevant. The crisis will impact heavily on both women's and men's efforts to find and keep decent work, and the progress made by ILO constituents around the world is threatened. Recovery packages that are designed too hurriedly and without sufficient social dialogue may inadvertently exacerbate existing sex discrimination in the labour market.

The report makes the case for scaling up measures to eliminate sex discrimination in the world of work and highlights ILO interventions in all regions. The ILO approach is grounded in the rights-based argument and the economic efficiency rationale: not only is gender equality in the world of work a matter of human rights and justice for workers, it also makes good business sense for employers and is instrumental in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction at national levels. The attainment of equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men despite the context of the current crisis may well be the litmus test for gauging whether member States are committed to greater coherence in economic and social policy.

Equality of rights applies throughout life. Women and men, from their early years through to old age, may face different manifestations of sex discrimination. This has clear life-cycle dimensions. More and more governments – as well as the social partners – are recognizing that if no remedial action is taken, disadvantages tend to accumulate and intensify over time and through generations, with negative repercussions for women, families and societies.

Safe maternity and health care for mother and infant survival is at the core of life itself, for mothers, infants, communities and nations. It is also central to decent work and productivity for women. The integration of maternity protection as part of social and economic policy is recognized in all regions. Maternity protection has two aims. First, it preserves the special relationship and the health of the mother and her newborn. Second, it provides a measure of job security, crucial for protecting pregnant workers and mothers. Pregnancy or motherhood should not constitute a source of discrimination in access to training, skills development and employment.

Having to work is one of the biggest obstacles to a decent childhood. Where poverty and discrimination prevail, so can child labour. Children may be freed from poverty and economic and social marginalization through education. Evidence from a range of countries shows that educating girls is one of the most effective ways of fighting poverty. Educated girls are more likely to have higher incomes and increased control over resources as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children and

exercise greater decision-making power within the household. Importantly, they are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated, thus increasing their earnings, avoiding future child labour and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Much action has to be taken to avoid exacerbating growing youth unemployment and working poverty, which are likely to worsen in the current global financial and economic crisis. Sex is not an indicator of competence, and the decision to recruit, train or promote young women and men should always be based on reasons such as skills and the inherent requirements of the job. It is now widely accepted that long-term investments in human capital play a key role in enhancing productivity and growth. Ensuring that adolescent and young girls are provided with quality formal and non-formal education programmes is essential. Young women and men need to be made aware of their rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining as means for attaining decent work.

For both adult men and women, pursuing decent work, providing and caring for family members, as well as fulfilling obligations to enterprises, communities and societies, is a tall order indeed. Women experience systemic barriers in almost every aspect of work – this ranges from whether they have paid work at all (full time or part time); the type of work they obtain or are excluded from; the availability of supports such as childcare; their pay, benefits and conditions of work; their access to higher-paying “male” occupations; the insecurity of their jobs or enterprises; the absence of pension entitlements or benefits; and the lack of the time, resources or information necessary to enforce their rights. Changing the gender division of labour in the household to a more equitable distribution of tasks, as well as investing in labour-saving technology, can have a significant impact on productivity. Men stand to gain in dual-income partnerships through better work/family balance, improved contact with children and inclusion in family life, as well as less vulnerability to economic shocks.

Longevity is one of the most positive and relevant demographic phenomena to emerge in recent decades, and a fundamental policy objective is to build societies fit for people of all ages. The ageing of populations and the new inter-generational relationships radically affect the human landscape and decent work. The ILO emphasizes that adequate employment policies, human resource development and lifelong learning are crucial in maximizing the potential of older women and men. The gender dimension of older workers’ labour force participation has been an important feature in employment policies targeting this age group. The shortfall in women’s economic participation and earnings means that they are inevitably at an economic disadvantage in old age. If and when better-educated women enter the labour force in greater numbers, and earn equal pay for work of equal value, they will be able to provide for themselves.

Looking at achievements since the last ILC discussion on the subject in 1985, it is generally recognized that there have been improvements in the policy and legislative framework for gender equality in the world of work and the enforcement of laws. Whether in the form of revised labour codes, equality or human rights acts or stand-alone equal pay statutes, legislators have included not only clear prohibitions of sex discrimination, but also proactive provisions aimed at equality of opportunity and treatment in the world of work. Both state bodies (such as labour administration systems, including inspectorates, labour tribunals and courts) and private-sector initiatives (such as corporate social responsibility and framework agreements) are better monitoring the application of laws and agreed principles.

Awareness of workers’ rights concerning equality of opportunity and treatment has increased across all regions. Information campaigns and constituents’ training courses

have empowered men and women workers – and their organizations – to protect their rights.

In addition, many governments have adopted active labour market policies that address gender inequalities within their overall objectives of job-rich growth and sustainable enterprises. ILO expertise has contributed to progress in women's economic empowerment through its research, services and advocacy efforts in lifelong learning and skills development, entrepreneurial skills enhancement, and microfinance and credit access.

This report gives an overview of ILO efforts to improve labour protection and promote the adoption of a basic social security package that assists both women and men. Establishing technically feasible and financially viable ways of extending coverage of basic health care, family/child benefits, targeted income support for the poor and unemployed, and old-age and disability pensions would provide a minimum safety net. Since poverty has a gender dimension that cannot be ignored, and the effects of economic growth have not trickled down to the poorest, public policies that encourage a fair distribution of national resources by implementing social security systems would make a substantial contribution to lifting the poorest out of extreme poverty.

ILO action over the last decades has also focused on the voice and visibility of women of all ages in the world of work. Tripartism and social dialogue are essential if real progress is to be made in attaining gender equality. Increasing the institutional capacity of member States, as well as of representative organizations of employers and workers, to facilitate meaningful and coherent social dialogue on gender equality will be necessary to mark an improvement in current practices. It is not only a matter of national gender machineries being more sensitive to world of work issues. It is also essential that national social dialogue institutions increase women's membership, and address gender concerns more seriously their policies and programmes.

Obstacles remain for the achievement of gender equality, such as poor implementation and enforcement of national policies. These occur at various levels; while it is increasingly accepted that obtaining and using sex-disaggregated data is the only firm basis for an accurate situation analysis and for gender-responsive planning, and for monitoring and evaluation, national capacity remains weak. Development policies and programmes must challenge stereotyped assumptions about gender roles that have become systemic. Proactive measures should be used, such as affirmative action, awareness raising on workers' rights, lifelong skills development and women's economic empowerment. Outdated systems that affect gender-neutral job evaluation for equal pay should be reformed.

Once again, by leveraging social dialogue for gender equality, political leadership can be influenced. First, an increase in the participation and status of women in the dialogue processes is necessary. Second, there is the challenge of introducing a gender perspective into the content of the issues on the social dialogue agenda, so as to reflect the changing nature of labour markets and patterns in the world of work. Within a broader development context, the ILO collaborates extensively on gender equality with the United Nations and its specialized agencies as part of the "Delivering as One" and UN reform process.

The report lists priorities in the concluding sections of the life cycle chapters, and in the last chapter on the main policy orientations for international and national action. These may guide the tripartite constituents in implementing measures to advance gender equality in the workplace, while charting a strategic course for the ILO's future work as it approaches its centennial.

# Abbreviations

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|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| ACT/EMP         | Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO)  |
| ACTRAV          | Bureau for Workers' Activities (ILO)  |
| AIDS            | acquired immunodeficiency syndrome  |
| CCT             | conditional cash transfer   |
| CEACR           | Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (ILO)            |
| CEDAW           | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations) |
| CEDAW Committee | Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (United Nations)               |
| CIS             | Commonwealth of Independent States  |
| CSW             | Commission on the Status of Women (United Nations)  |
| DAW             | Division for the Advancement of Women (United Nations)                                      |
| DESA            | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations)                                  |
| DIALOGUE        | Social Dialogue, Labour Law and Labour Administration Branch (ILO)                          |
| ECLAC           | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (United Nations)                    |
| ECOSOC          | Economic and Social Council (United Nations)  |
| EFA             | Education for All   |
| EI              | Education International   |
| EPZ             | export processing zone  |
| ERM             | European Regional Meeting (ILO)   |
| ETUC            | European Trade Union Confederation  |
| EU              | European Union  |
| FAO             | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations                                     |
| GDP             | gross domestic product  |
| GEA             | Global Employment Agenda  |
| GENDER          | Bureau for Gender Equality (ILO)  |
| GPE             | Gender, Poverty and Employment Programme (ILO)  |

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| GRB     | gender-responsive budgeting  |
| HIV     | human immunodeficiency virus   |
| IBRD    | International Bank for Reconstruction and Development  |
| ICFTU   | International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (now ITUC)  |
| ICT     | information and communication technology   |
| IFAD    | International Fund for Agricultural Development  |
| IILS    | International Institute for Labour Studies   |
| ILC     | International Labour Conference  |
| IOE     | International Organisation of Employers  |
| IPEC    | International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO)   |
| IPU     | Inter-Parliamentary Union  |
| ITC–ILO | International Training Centre of the ILO   |
| ITUC    | International Trade Union Confederation  |
| IUF     | International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations |
| MDG     | Millennium Development Goal  |
| NGO     | non-governmental organization  |
| OECD    | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development   |
| OSH     | occupational safety and health   |
| PGA     | Participatory Gender Audit (ILO)   |
| PRS     | Poverty Reduction Strategy   |
| PRSP    | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper   |
| PSI     | Public Services International  |
| PTE     | part-time employment   |
| SIYB    | Start and Improve Your Business  |
| SME     | small and medium-sized enterprise  |
| TRAVAIL | Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (ILO)  |
| UN      | United Nations   |
| UNAIDS  | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS   |
| UNCT    | United Nations country team  |
| UNDAF   | United Nations Development Assistance Framework  |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme   |
| UNEP    | United Nations Environment Programme   |
| UNESCO  | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization   |
| UNFPA   | United Nations Population Fund   |
| UNGEI   | United Nations Girls' Education Initiative   |



|        |  |
|--------|--|
| UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund                           |
| UNIFEM | United Nations Development Fund for Women                |
| UNRISD | United Nations Research Institute for Social Development |
| WEDGE  | Women’s Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality |
| WHO    | World Health Organization                                |

# Contents

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|   | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| Executive summary .....   | vii         |
| Abbreviations.....  | xi          |
| Introduction.....   | 1           |
| Chapter 1. Gender equality and the Decent Work Agenda .....         | 7           |
| 1.1. Access to employment.....                                      | 7           |
| 1.2. Access to social protection .....                              | 10          |
| 1.3. Access to social dialogue .....                                | 12          |
| 1.4. Access to principles and rights .....                          | 13          |
| 1.5. Gender, the ILO and the United Nations .....                   | 17          |
| 1.5.1. ILO tools in UN collaboration .....                          | 17          |
| 1.5.2. ILO and the inter-agency system.....                         | 18          |
| 1.5.3. The ILO and One UN country programmes.....                   | 20          |
| 1.5.4. Functional commissions and treaty bodies.....                | 21          |
| Chapter 2. Gender equality and tensions in a globalized world ..... | 23          |
| 2.1. Women, men and poverty.....                                    | 23          |
| 2.2. Gender and the current financial and economic crisis .....     | 25          |
| 2.3. Climate change .....   | 27          |
| 2.4. Gender and the demographic situation.....                      | 28          |
| 2.5. Decent work in the life cycle .....                            | 31          |
| 2.6. Men and gender relations .....                                 | 32          |
| 2.7. Selected themes common across the life cycle .....             | 33          |
| 2.7.1. Violence against women and girls .....                       | 33          |
| 2.7.2. Domestic labour .....  | 35          |
| 2.7.3. HIV and AIDS .....   | 37          |
| Chapter 3. Maternity, healthy infancy and working parents.....      | 39          |
| 3.1. ILO action .....   | 43          |
| 3.1.1. Employment.....  | 43          |
| 3.1.2. Social protection .....                                      | 45          |
| 3.1.3. Social dialogue .....  | 50          |
| 3.1.4. Principles and rights .....                                  | 51          |

|            |  |     |
|------------|--|-----|
| 3.2.       | Links to the United Nations and international agencies ..... | 53  |
| 3.3.       | The way forward .....  | 54  |
| Chapter 4. | A decent childhood for both girls and boys .....             | 57  |
| 4.1.       | Gender and education .....                                   | 57  |
| 4.2.       | Girls, boys and household chores .....                       | 59  |
| 4.3.       | Gender and working children .....                            | 59  |
| 4.3.1.     | Worst forms of child labour .....                            | 63  |
| 4.4.       | ILO action .....   | 66  |
| 4.4.1.     | Adult employment instead of child labour .....               | 66  |
| 4.4.2.     | Social protection .....                                      | 67  |
| 4.4.3.     | Social dialogue in defence of children .....                 | 69  |
| 4.4.4.     | Principles and rights .....                                  | 70  |
| 4.5.       | Links to the United Nations and international agencies ..... | 73  |
| 4.6.       | The way forward .....  | 74  |
| Chapter 5. | Gender, youth and employment .....                           | 77  |
| 5.1.       | Gender issues .....  | 79  |
| 5.1.1.     | Gender, youth and social stability .....                     | 81  |
| 5.1.2.     | Gender roles and women's labour force participation .....    | 82  |
| 5.1.3.     | Occupational segregation and stereotyping .....              | 84  |
| 5.1.4.     | Export processing zones .....                                | 85  |
| 5.2.       | ILO action .....   | 86  |
| 5.2.1.     | Employment .....   | 86  |
| 5.2.2.     | Social protection .....                                      | 89  |
| 5.2.4.     | Social dialogue .....  | 94  |
| 5.2.5.     | Principles and rights .....                                  | 96  |
| 5.3.       | Links to the United Nations and international agencies ..... | 99  |
| 5.4.       | The way forward .....  | 100 |
| Chapter 6. | Working women and men in adulthood .....                     | 103 |
| 6.1.       | Global supply chains .....                                   | 108 |
| 6.2.       | Vulnerable employment .....                                  | 109 |
| 6.3.       | Non-standard forms of work .....                             | 112 |
| 6.3.1.     | Part-time employment .....                                   | 112 |
| 6.3.2.     | The informal economy .....                                   | 114 |
| 6.3.3.     | Home work .....  | 115 |
| 6.4.       | Entrepreneurship .....                                       | 116 |
| 6.5.       | Equal pay .....  | 117 |
| 6.6.       | Migration .....  | 120 |
| 6.7.       | The care economy .....                                       | 121 |

|            |  |     |
|------------|--|-----|
| 6.8.       | ILO action .....   | 125 |
| 6.8.1.     | Employment.....  | 125 |
| 6.8.2.     | Social protection .....  | 127 |
| 6.8.3.     | Social dialogue .....  | 131 |
| 6.8.4.     | Principles and rights .....  | 133 |
| 6.9.       | Working with the United Nations and international agencies.....            | 139 |
| 6.10.      | The way forward .....  | 139 |
| Chapter 7. | Older workers and the senior years: Rights, jobs and social security ..... | 143 |
| 7.1.       | ILO action .....   | 149 |
| 7.1.1.     | Employment.....  | 149 |
| 7.1.2.     | Social protection .....  | 150 |
| 7.1.3.     | Social dialogue .....  | 152 |
| 7.1.4.     | Principles and rights .....  | 154 |
| 7.2.       | Links to the United Nations and international agencies.....                | 155 |
| 7.3.       | The way forward .....  | 156 |
| Chapter 8. | Main policy orientations for international and national action .....       | 157 |
| 8.1.       | Leveraging social dialogue for gender equality .....                       | 157 |
| 8.2.       | Men and women in leadership positions.....                                 | 158 |
| 8.3.       | Enhancing governance through gender equality .....                         | 159 |
| 8.4.       | What has worked and what needs more attention.....                         | 162 |
| 8.5.       | Future work.....   | 165 |
|            | Suggested points for discussion.....                                       | 169 |
|            | Appendix .....   | 171 |



# Introduction

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1. Securing decent work is crucial for women and men, making it possible for them to build more promising futures for themselves, their families and their communities. Sustainable development is achieved through the contributions of both women and men. Socially constructed gender roles, the biological differences between men and women, and how these interact in the world of work are therefore at the core of decent work.<sup>1</sup> The ILO Constitution foresaw the need for workplace equality, and today, in the twenty-first century, the ILO continues to pursue this goal. This was strongly reaffirmed in the landmark ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (the 2008 Declaration), adopted at the International Labour Conference (ILC) at its 97th Session in 2008. In an opportune coincidence, the item “Gender equality at the heart of decent work”<sup>2</sup> was chosen for a general discussion by the ILC in 2009, the year in which the ILO celebrates its 90th anniversary. This report therefore aims to provide a basis for constituents to engage in dialogue on this cross-cutting issue at the heart of the ILO’s four strategic objectives (employment, social protection, social dialogue and tripartism, and principles and rights). The main premise of the report is that there is a gender dimension to all aspects of the world of work and the life cycle of human beings. That premise is grounded in research, analysis and the legal underpinning of the four international labour Conventions recognized as the key equality Conventions: the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156); and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

2. It has been over 20 years since gender equality was the topic of a general discussion by the ILC; the last time was in 1985, when the subject “Equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment” was debated.<sup>3</sup> As table 1 shows, there have been many positive developments in gender equality throughout the world over the past two decades. Yet many gender equality issues have not been adequately addressed over the years, and important gaps observed in the 1985 report still exist today across the regions. And in times of crisis, such as the current financial and economic downturn, fragile gains could be jeopardized. After decades of national and

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<sup>1</sup> Gender roles are defined by social groups and cultural traditions. They greatly affect the world of work and condition which activities, tasks and responsibilities are perceived as appropriate to men and women. These divisions of labour are formed by age, race and ethnicity, religion and culture and are also influenced by socio-economic class and the political environment. They change over time. The biological differences in the sexes are governed by their singular physiological attributes, such as female and male musculoskeletal builds or their reproductive functions. These differences clearly have a bearing on the world of work. ILO: *ABC of women workers’ rights and gender equality*, second edition (Geneva, 2007), p. 89 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The agenda item was proposed to the ILO Governing Body at its 298th Session (March 2007) in document “Agenda of the 98th Session (2009) of the International Labour Conference” (GB.298/2, point 6, para. 75). The ILO Governing Body took the decision to select this agenda item, as reflected in the minutes of the 298th Session (GB.298/PV, para. 57(ii)).

<sup>3</sup> ILO: *Equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment*, Report VII, ILC, 71st Session, Geneva, 1985 (referred to hereinafter as the 1985 report).

international commitment to gender equality, the unfortunate reality is that much discrimination still persists.

**Table 1. Historical timeline of gender equality in the world of work: Selected dates**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1919 | ■ Constitution of the ILO  |
|      | ■ Maternity Protection Convention (No. 3)  |
| 1944 | ■ Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation (Declaration of Philadelphia)              |
| 1948 | ■ Universal Declaration of Human Rights  |
|      | ■ Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised) (No. 89)   |
| 1951 | ■ Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)  |
| 1952 | ■ Maternity Protection Convention (Revised) (No. 103) and Recommendation (No. 95)  |
| 1958 | ■ Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) and Recommendation (No. 111)                                     |
| 1964 | ■ Employment Policy Convention (No. 122) and Recommendation (No. 122)  |
| 1974 | ■ Paid Educational Leave Convention (No. 140)  |
| 1975 | ■ First World Conference on Women (Mexico City)  |
|      | ■ Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers   |
|      | ■ Human Resources Development Convention (No. 142) and Recommendation (No. 150)  |
| 1976 | ■ Office of the Special Adviser for Women Workers' Questions (FEMMES) established  |
| 1977 | ■ Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy                                      |
| 1979 | ■ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (in force 1981)                               |
| 1980 | ■ Second World Conference on Women (Copenhagen)  |
| 1981 | ■ Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Recommendation (No. 165)   |
| 1982 | ■ ILO Mid-Term Plan (1982–87) includes “women workers” as one of 6 global themes   |
| 1984 | ■ Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation (No. 169)  |
| 1985 | ■ Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi)  |
|      | ■ ILC 71st Session resolution on equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment                           |
| 1986 | ■ Governing Body evaluates women-specific technical cooperation (TC) programmes and recommends women in development (WID) approach |
| 1987 | ■ Governing Body endorses Plan of Action on equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women in employment                   |
| 1988 | ■ Guidelines for integrating women's interests in TC project design  |
| 1990 | ■ Night Work Convention (No. 171) and Recommendation (No. 178)   |
|      | ■ Launch of Interdepartmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment  |
| 1991 | ■ ILC 78th Session resolution concerning ILO action for women workers  |
| 1993 | ■ World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna) and Programme of Action  |
| 1994 | ■ Part-Time Work Convention (No. 175) and Recommendation (No. 182)   |
| 1995 | ■ World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen)   |
|      | ■ Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing)   |
|      | ■ ILO Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality  |
|      | ■ Office Circular on sexual harassment policy and procedures (No. 543)   |
| 1996 | ■ Home Work Convention (No. 177) and Recommendation (No. 184)  |
| 1997 | ■ Launch of TC project “More and Better Jobs for Women”  |
| 1998 | ■ ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work   |
|      | ■ Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation (No. 189)  |
| 1999 | ■ CEDAW Optional Protocol  |
|      | ■ Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) and Recommendation (No. 190)  |
|      | ■ Bureau for Gender Equality (GENDER) established  |
|      | ■ Office Circular on gender equality and mainstreaming in the ILO (No. 564)  |
| 2000 | ■ World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Copenhagen +5 (Geneva)   |
|      | ■ 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly: Beijing +5 (New York)  |
|      | ■ Millennium Development Goals   |
|      | ■ Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and Recommendation (No. 191)   |
| 2001 | ■ First Participatory Gender Audit in the Office   |
| 2002 | ■ Governing Body examines report on first Participatory Gender Audit in the Office   |
| 2004 | ■ ILC 92nd Session resolution concerning the promotion of gender equality, pay equity and maternity protection                     |
| 2005 | ■ Governing Body instruction to include gender in technical cooperation  |
| 2006 | ■ Employment Relationship Recommendation (No. 198)   |
| 2008 | ■ ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization   |

3. One area in which progress has certainly been made is the level and intensity of the debate on gender equality within the ILO itself. Positioning it as a cross-cutting issue has given a solid boost to the incorporation of the gender dimension into all of the ILO's work. This is due to a better understanding of gender issues within the Office, resulting from a surge of support from the highest levels of management. The ILO's commitment to developing an evidence base despite the paucity of data, its promotion of the key equality Conventions, and its advice to constituents on policy and legal frameworks for equality have led to considerable advances over the last decades. Efforts to view the employment and social protection issues facing women and men through a gender lens have resulted in both internal capacity building and outreach to constituents. The International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC–ILO) in Turin has been working for more than two decades in developing and implementing gender training programmes for ILO constituents, development agencies and other stakeholders. ILO researchers have tracked academic studies and conducted primary research on a wide variety of gender equality issues in the world of work.<sup>4</sup> A commitment to gender equality by key ILO donors has led to technical cooperation projects and programmes being expanded beyond women-specific goals towards an approach that incorporates the implications for both sexes. This was reflected in the Governing Body's decision on gender mainstreaming in technical cooperation of 2005.<sup>5</sup> The importance of social dialogue in making inroads for gender equality is both recognized and integrated in the means and the end results of ILO action. The 2009 general discussion offers a timely opportunity to move the discourse to action and guide the Organization's future aspirations for promoting gender equality.<sup>6</sup>

4. The three objectives of this general discussion are: (1) to conduct a comprehensive review of the ILO's progress in assisting constituents to achieve gender equality in the world of work; (2) to highlight its current efforts to implement ILC resolutions and Governing Body decisions on promoting and mainstreaming gender equality into the Decent Work Agenda; and (3) to provide a forum to help constituents chart a strategic course for future work. This third objective is crucial as the Organization gears up for the Strategic Policy Framework 2010–15. Its conclusions will guide the ILO and its constituents over the coming decade in ensuring that gender equality remains a top priority on decent work agendas at international, regional and national levels.

5. This report offers the basis for a review in the light of ILC resolutions and Governing Body decisions on gender equality and the relevant international labour standards mentioned above. In addition to the selected milestones listed in table 1, the major policy documents in question are indicated in table 2.

<sup>4</sup> For example, M. Fetherolf Loutfi (ed.): *Women, gender and work: What is equality and how do we get there?* (Geneva, ILO, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See ILO: *Thematic evaluation report: Gender issues in technical cooperation*, Governing Body, 292nd Session, Geneva, Mar. 2005, GB.292/TC/1, para. 46; and GB.292/PV, para. 223.

<sup>6</sup> The ILO's goal is gender equality. This is supported by gender mainstreaming, which is the primary tool used to accelerate progress toward equality between women and men. In the ILO, a two-pronged approach to mainstreaming is applied: first, through explicitly and systematically addressing the specific and often different needs and concerns of both women and men in all policies, strategies and programmes; and second, through targeted interventions when analysis shows that one sex – usually women – is socially, politically and/or economically disadvantaged. Such initiatives aimed at women's empowerment are an essential part of gender mainstreaming and might include, for example, affirmative action measures.

Table 2. ILO policy on gender equality

| ILC resolutions  | Governing Body decisions  |
|--|---|
| ■ 1991 resolution concerning ILO action for women workers (ILC, 78th Session)  | ■ 2002 endorsement of the first ILO Participatory Gender Audit, based on Committee on Employment and Social Policy document GB.285/ESP/7/1, 285th Session, Nov. 2002            |
| ■ 2004 resolution concerning the promotion of gender equality, pay equity and maternity protection (ILC, 92nd Session) | ■ 2005 instruction to include gender equality in the Office's technical cooperation, based on Committee on Technical Cooperation document GB.292/TC/1, 292nd Session, Mar. 2005 |

6. This general discussion takes place at a time when globalization and the current global financial crisis, as well highly volatile food prices and oil price fluctuations, are profoundly affecting societies worldwide. These crises highlight the importance of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, and vindicate the Organization's adherence to its rights-based mandate and the principles of tripartism and social dialogue. In 2004, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization was prescient in pointing to persistent concern over the uneven impact of globalization on many people, and the exclusion of many others from its benefits.<sup>7</sup> A piecemeal approach to addressing the challenges of globalization would not work; there was a need for greater coherence in economic and social policy and greater accountability to all.

7. The 2008 Declaration has proven to be prophetic in its timing. Reaffirming the four ILO strategic objectives as sound bases for economic and social policies and with gender equality cutting across all four, it provides a global compass to help prevent vulnerable countries from drifting further into inequality. It aims for "an improved and fair outcome for all".

8. The *World of Work Report 2008*<sup>8</sup> draws attention to the disproportionate effects of the current global economic slowdown on low-income groups. Income inequality was already on the rise in most countries, despite the recent period of economic expansion and a 30 per cent increase in world employment. However, employment growth was accompanied by a redistribution of income away from labour. Not everyone enjoyed the same opportunity for employment gains. Two-thirds of the countries surveyed in the above Report experienced an increase in income inequality between their richer and poorer households. It comes as no surprise that current forecasts point to a continued rise in global income inequality, which in the worst cases can lead to social instability, violence, higher crime rates and lower life expectancy. The ILO *Global Employment Trends* for January 2009 project sharp increases in unemployment. In addition, both working poverty and vulnerable employment will be affected, and encouraging trends that were seen up to 2007 might reverse, or at least stagnate.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See ILO: *Decent work for a fair globalization: Broadening and strengthening dialogue*, Overview paper for the ILO Forum on Decent Work for a Fair Globalization, Lisbon, 31 October–2 November 2007, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS): *World of Work Report 2008: Income inequalities in the age of financial globalization* (Geneva, ILO, 2008), pp. 1–2.

<sup>9</sup> ILO: *Global Employment Trends: January 2009* (Geneva, 2009), p. 24.



9. Against this background, the pursuit of gender equality is justified on two grounds:
- First, there is the rights-based equity rationale. It argues the need to address the discrimination<sup>10</sup> women face in the world of work, as a matter of fundamental human rights and justice. Despite the noble goal of outlawing discrimination based on sex, women continue to face disadvantages compared with men, who enjoy greater opportunities and better treatment in all areas of economic life. Although in recent decades more women have been participating in the labour force, job quantity has not been matched by job quality. In 2007, some 1.2 billion women were either employed or looking for work, yet many millions of them faced discrimination in access to training and jobs, were confined to mostly “female” occupations, had little chance of mobility, received lower pay for work of equal value or were unable to earn an adequate income. In a number of regions, women continue to feature disproportionately among the non-employed – reaching nearly 80 per cent in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia and the Pacific.<sup>11</sup> Marginalized populations, especially indigenous and tribal women, are exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and consistently fare poorly in terms of socio-economic opportunities and treatment.<sup>12</sup> These types of inequality deprive women of choice and opportunities in employment and are contrary to normative considerations of fairness and justice.
  - Second, there is the economic efficiency rationale, which argues that women can play a critical role as economic agents capable of transforming societies and economies. Equality is not just an intrinsic value and a right in itself, but is instrumental in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction. Relevant in all cultural settings, economic empowerment of women unleashes their socio-economic potential as a force for development.<sup>13</sup> Women’s increased bargaining power and decision-making ability in the household, as well as their improved status and income, have led to a number of positive secondary effects, such as enhanced child nutrition, health and education, better childcaring practices,<sup>14</sup> lower infant mortality rates and less child labour.

10. Equality of rights applies throughout life. This is recognized in the Preamble to the Constitution of the ILO, adopted in 1919, which refers to the need to eliminate workplace injustice and improve conditions of labour across all age groups. The life-cycle approach has been used by the United Nations to tackle gender issues, and was advocated at both the Beijing and the Copenhagen Conferences (see table 1). This report has adopted a gender and life-cycle framework for the following reasons:

<sup>10</sup> Article 1(1)(a) of Convention No. 111 defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or preference based on the grounds of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin which has a negative effect on equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

<sup>11</sup> ILS: *World of Work Report 2008: Income inequalities in the age of financial globalization* (Geneva, ILO, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Recent ILO studies reveal that indigenous and tribal women and girls have been amongst the most vulnerable in the context of globalization. See ILO: *Eliminating discrimination against indigenous and tribal peoples in employment and occupation: A guide to ILO Convention No. 111* (Geneva, 2007). See also ILO: *Indigenous women in the world of work: Based on case studies from Bangladesh, Nepal and Latin America* (Geneva, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> This includes programmes, policies and special measures for the improvement of indigenous women’s economic and social conditions through support of their traditional occupations and expansion of alternative employment opportunities if they so choose. See ILO: *Indigenous women in the world of work*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> N. Jones, M. Mukherjee and S. Galab: *Ripple effects or deliberate intentions? Assessing linkages between women’s empowerment and childhood poverty* (UNICEF, May 2007), p. 31.