

## 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 International Labor Organization's (ILO) standards on the Conditions of Work and is critical to achieving the UN's Millennium goals to eliminate poverty worldwide.

The ILO 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 potential.
- 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 female employment is in part-time jobs, while in developing countries, women go into the informal sector and home-based work.
- Globally, women earn 20-30 % less than men and thus their families suffer.
- Of the 1.5 billion people living on less than 50p a day, 70 per cent are female, with 96 million young women aged 15 to 24 unable to read or write - almost double the number for males.

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 about 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, abuse, and communicable diseases, such as AIDS. 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))

The World Bank has found that when a country improves education for girls, its overall per capita income increases and its fertility rate drops. Other studies show that improved female education is linked to higher crop yields, lower HIV infection rates, and reduced infant mortality. UNICEF's annual "State of the World's Children Report" calls gender equity - particularly in education - a "double dividend" for developing countries. "With education, the girl child will grow up and be a better mother - she will be better able to understand the importance of her own children being educated, and will be better able to provide for her children," says Sarah Crowe, a spokesperson for UNICEF in Johannesburg. "Men and boys are often out of the home," she notes, so that fathers are less able to teach their children what they have learned.

### **Why girls don't stay in school**

The reasons are myriad. In urban areas, pregnancy and poverty limit educational access. In rural regions, poor families need girls to help in the fields. When a financially strapped family must choose between sending a son or daughter to school, cultural norms favor the boy. And across southern Africa, when relatives fall ill from AIDS, girls are the ones who stay home to give care. Now, the challenge is to secure long-term funding, to hire and train enough teachers to manage millions of new students, and to make sure educational quality goes along with access, researchers and aid groups say. Advocates are also pushing for free secondary education, which they say will further increase girls' literacy.

### **Women Receive Less Coaching**

The number of women who are ascending to senior leadership posts remains small. The January 2007 issue of ASTD's *T+D* magazine reports that more women are emerging in visible leadership roles in politics and business, but the public gains often overshadow the slow rate of leadership training they receive in the workforce. According to a recent survey, Novations Group, a Boston-based training and consulting organization, women continue to lag behind men in the amount of coaching they receive—a crucial element needed to advance on the leadership track.

Deborah Felton, director of consulting at Novations, says that the leadership selection process is not intentionally biased against women. She says that women need to be more assertive in seeking the necessary support from within an organization. "A lot of women that I coach try to figure out everything on their own," she says. "They don't want to be seen as a poor choice for the position or as someone who is not meeting expectations."

Felton points to the socialization of women as one reason why they may not be on the fast track to leadership positions. The traditional or, as some might say, stereotypical traits of a leader are assertive behavior, competitiveness, and a willingness to take risks. Women need to be coached to understand that it is perfectly acceptable and often expected to ask questions when navigating the leadership pipeline.

"Women exhibit different behaviors that can get in the way of being successful," Felton said. "Some need help in building confidence, developing a visible track record, and taking risks."

Novations uses the Four Stages of Contribution, developed by Gene Dalton and Paul Thompson, to examine leadership in an organization. The first two stages call for learning by asking questions and then working independently. The transition from stage two to stage three is the most difficult because it requires a psychological shift along with a change in the way employees do their work. Instead of working independently, stage three employees work through others (coaching, delegating, managing)—thus multiplying their contribution to the organization.

By the third stage, employees begin to contribute through others and build a network. During the fourth and final stage, leaders contribute to the overall strategic direction of an organization. According to Novations, it requires coaching to make a successful transition to stages three and four.

The last two stages are considered senior leadership positions, and Novations's research indicates that women are still disproportionately represented in those categories. Only 13 percent of women reached stage three, while only 7 percent reached stage four.

### **World-wide Solutions**

Fortunately, there are many positive developments that are emerging to address these challenges. World Governments and international agencies have recognized this, and are working towards solutions. The UN Millennium Development Goals call for both gender equity and universal primary education by 2015. Many African governments have recently eliminated primary school fees, which have hampered girls' enrollment.

Achieving the goals of *Education for All*, notably the world-wide commitments that focus on gender equality in education and training are vital contributions. Ultimately, empowerment through education contributes to building better societies and relationships based on gender equality and mutual respect. Ms. Ophrey Winfrey's private school, is one of the most recent and high-profile projects in a growing worldwide campaign to improve girls' education. Such female-focused aid yields perhaps the highest dividends for developing nations, say experts, though they are quick to point out that boys face challenges as well.

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).

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