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| **Building Sustainable Management/Union Relationship for Industrial Harmony** |
| **Incorporating Gender Equality into Trade Union Strategies and Actions** |
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**Introduction:**

While gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming have become buzz word and phrase in various development circles and organisations, the terms are largely misunderstood and or misused. Without prejudice to our understanding and usage of the concepts of gender equity in the world of work, this paper shall mainly attempt to do an analysis of the various attempts of trade unions strategies to discuss and reduce workplace gender inequality through gender policy, inclusion of clauses in collective bargaining agreement and putting in place structures for gender equity by the trade union in various organized workplaces eg. Hotel Union have demonstrated this in its vast workplace agreement, while we extol the successes and censure and the weaknesses with a view to recommending more appropriate strategies that will lead to more successful outcomes. The presentation will attempt to be issue based. Thus this paper will attempt to provoke an interactive discuss where we relate to practical experiences around us and especially in the course of our lives as women and men and as workers and trade unionists.

**Background**

Trade unions have a history in the struggle for social and economic justice. It has consistently been an advocate of equal opportunities and equal rights.In the last three decades, trade unions have made significant progress towards gender equality with increasing space on equal opportunities for women and men. However, there is still much to be done to ensure equal power relation, opportunities and rights as in policy as well as in practice.

Gender and gender mainstreaming as a concept was first made popular at the fourth World Women Conference in Nairobi 1985. At the 1995 Beijing World Women Conference, a gender strategy was adopted to be incorporated into every development agenda with the aim of achieving gender equality, meaning equal distribution of power to both women and men towards mitigating all forms of limiting patriarchal normsboth at the workplace and the larger society.Yet gender mainstreaming as a strategy and a tool that supports membership quality and trade union power is yet to be adequately entrenched in trade union work.

**Definitions**

* **Sex:** Biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women e.g. female, male. It has specific characteristics. It is static, natural and universal.
* **Gender:** Socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers feminine or masculine. What is defined as appropriate for woman or man. It varies with space and time. It is ascribed by the society and not naturally given
* **Gender awareness:** the ability to view society from the perspective of gender roles and how this has affected women’s needs in comparison to the needs of men
* **Gender sensitivity:** translating this awareness into action in the design of development policies, programs and budgets.
* **Gender Equality:** refers to equality in law, rights and resources, access to political and economic opportunities.

**Gender Mainstreaming: A Strategy and Tool**

Gender Mainstreaming is about re-organizing the processes of decision making and traditional business of an organization by integrating gender as a core value and component all through.

It is a strategy that incorporates the interests and experiences of women as much as men through the process of the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes so that women and men benefit equally without prejudice.

Mainstreaming is characterized by gender-specific program, affirmative action and empowerment for either women or men who are clearly disadvantaged.

Gender mainstreaming strategy can target women exclusively, men and women together, or only men, to enable them to participate in and benefit equally from development process.

Gender Mainstreaming is a temporary measure designed to combat the direct and indirect consequences of past discrimination and inequality.

In trade unions, gender mainstreaming would constitute an assessment and incorporation of gender in all policy and decision making processes, in representations within and outside the unions.

It is a long process that requires commitment and active implementation of programs.

**Gender Issues in Trade unions**

Gender issues in trade unions manifests in roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men. These are stereotyped roles that are ascribed based on sex and gender.

Women are good with money so they can be treasurers

Women as mothers and housewives are good home managers so they take care of catering, reception and welfare

Women’s beauty attract like flowers so they are used as ushers

Men are tough and hard so they can hold meetings anywhere and anytime

On the very negative side: Women are soft and tender so can’t do the job of a president or general secretary because they require hardness

Women are lazy and weak so cannot be made leaders among men

Women are overburdened with motherhood and wifehood so cannot attend long courses

Women are talkative so cannot be part of caucuses

Women lack ideas and so cannot be given core responsibility without a male supervision

Men have resources to attain leadership positions, women are poor

Women have been known to hold highly responsible positions within and outside the trade unions

Women have been known to challenge maleness in professions that were seen as male preserve

Women have been known to outplay men in intelligence and general knowledge

Gender relations are based on power relations, thus the common experience is that men due to circumstances of history and class have the power edge.

Exploring real or imagined weaknesses is a strategy to keep a power base and a factor to be explored in gender mainstreaming.

**What is being done?**

**At the regional and global level:** 30-50% affirmative action for conference, trainings and meetings in favour of women

* Special training programs for women only or men only as it may apply

**At the national level:** Upgrading of women desk in many unions to women department

* Establishment of the Women Commission away from Women’s wing
* Adoption of the gender equity policy
* Inclusion of chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the commission as members of NAC, CWC and NEC

**At state level**: the chairperson and secretary of SWC as members of SAC and SEC

**The Challenges**

1. Trade union culture, use of language, images norms and values which have been traditionally patriarchal block the entry for ‘decent’ women
2. The subconscious of maleness permeates through daily lives and activities. The face of trade unionism is male and masculine. The face of empowerment is female and feminine.
3. The success of female leaders is determined by their maleness
4. Work environment and facilities are often gender blind or neutral. e.g. prenatal and post natal provisions for women, issues in maternity and paternity leave
5. Work timings and schedules
6. Timing and places of meetings
7. Culture and tradition
8. Multiple roles played by women as against men

The trade union is a unit part of the broad community where patriarchy and women subordination thrives

1. Women and men members of the trade unions have grown through a common socialization process that defined their gender
2. Outside the trade union community they go back to their traditional communities where gender roles are reinforced
3. Globalizations and the rules and regulations that guide international trade have created a large pool of the informal sector where women have a significant population
4. Subcontracting, actualization and increasing job insecurity with an attendant increase of family responsibility on women creates little time and resources for active trade union participation

**Interventions**

While capacity building activities need to address a range of inequalities that affect women, there is need to re-assess the number of activities that target women alone. This is especially so where men also need to be sufficiently sensitized for an effective gender equality which is expected to be about women and men. This could be a strategy to attract male dominated leadership especially in terms of budget allocation and participation.

We need to consider incorporating gender issues and especially of equality in our daily activities and programmme. 30-50% affirmative action must be included in trainings, conferences, board membership and representations at national and international levels. Gender desks and women departments should do a quarterly review of the situation of gender in the trade unions while encourage active participation, mentoring and leadership training.

Support women participation by special trainings and special budget. Identify skills and capacity through membership audit including reports of gender based violence in the workplace. Perform an annual gender impact assessment of all programs and activities of membership organizations and trade unions. Review and deepen the gender content of education and research programmes and activities.

**Working With Men toPromote Workplace Equality**

Men are not only the predominant perpetrators of inequality, but their decision making roles and power in the economic, political (including trade union political leaders) and social spheres necessitate their commitment to eradicating inequality and instituting equity.

An important aspect of the significance of involving men in efforts to achieve gender equity is that men hold higher positions of power and decision making in most communities in the world, making it fundamental to garner their support and commitment, cooperation, partnership and dialogue between women and men must be fostered in order to create changes and foster environments that nurture peace and development with gender equity.

In addition, working with men to end violence in the world of work should be viewed as part of an **overall goal of achieving gender equality**, meaning that working with men is complementary to empowering women and achieving gender equality as a whole.

**Conclusion**

Gender mainstreaming is a concept that addresses the wellbeing of women and men. It is a strategy that aims at gender equality

In spite of the progress made by the NLC and its affiliates over the last two decades with respect to gender, translating policy objectives to true practice remains very challenging as much in the trade unions as it is in national development outcome. The success of gender mainstreaming depends on commitment and the sincere translation of policy into action.

Violence against women and men in the world of work is an abuse of power that affects the most marginalized workers. Women are extremely affected due to unequal power relations, low pay, non-standard working conditions and other workplace abuses expose them to violence in the world of work. This presentation draws on the work of Global Union Federations and 35 national case studies from different sectors and countries across the world to show that through collective agreements, workplace policies and negotiations, campaigns and awareness raising, trade unions have taken constructive steps to ensure gender equity in the world of work

Finally in the words of Wendy Harcourt a professor of Gender, diversity and sustainable development; "The time is past when a women's movement had to exclude men in the fight 'against' patriarchy and all its negative effects, the time has come rather for women's visions to restructure and redefine work and interventions in order to fashion a new society for women and men based on women's experiences and skills as care-givers and reproducers. It is not a question of adding gender to the world's major origin and development, but rather of rewriting the latter at their very roots."

***Thank you!!!***

***NSU!!!***

***(Nagode!Ese! Daalu!)***