

Report of  
The Workshop on  
“Promoting Gender Equality at the Workplace ”

Dhaka  
March 29, 2007

Organized by  
ILO Office in Bangladesh

The ILO Office in Dhaka organized a day-long workshop titled, “**Promoting Gender Equality at the Workplace**” at BRAC Inn, BRAC Centre, Dhaka, on March 29, 2007 (See appendix-I for programme). The workshop was organized to sensitize relevant stakeholders regarding the issue of gender equality at the workplace.

Mr. Nurunnabi Khan, representative of the ILO Office in Dhaka, Mr. Amin Sharif, representative of the Ministry of Labour, Government of Bangladesh, Mr. Obaidur Rahman Khan, Vice President of Bangladesh Employers’ Federation and Mr. Mujibur Rahman Bhuiya, Chairman of National Coordination Committee for Workers’ Education (NCCWE) addressed the workshop during the inaugural session. Ms. Sheepa Hafiza, Director Human Resources, BRAC attended the workshop as the resource person. Mr. Shahabuddin Khan, Programme Officer, ILO Office in Dhaka moderated the workshop. Representatives from various companies, labour federations, relevant departments of the government, entrepreneurs’ associations took part in this day-long workshop (See appendix-II for the ‘List of participants’). The detailed report of the proceeding of the event is as follows.

### **Opening Session**

The proceeding of the workshop was started with the opening remarks delivered by Mr. Nurunnabi Khan, representative of ILO Office in Dhaka at 9.30 a.m. At the outset of his remarks, Mr. Khan welcomed the participants to the event on behalf of the ILO and stated the rationale of organizing the workshop. He stated that gender is one of much prioritized issues across the globe and in explaining why the ILO attaches importance to this issue, he noted that ILO is a global organization which has four fundamental principles: 1. freedom of association (right to organize and bargain collectively), 2. abolition of forced and compulsory labour, 3. elimination of discrimination at workplace and 4, elimination of the child labour. And the principle of elimination of discrimination at workplace, he noted, is linked to the issue of the promotion of gender equality at the workplace.

He went on saying that the ILO has two specific conventions regarding the elimination of discrimination: 1. Convention 100 (On Equal Remuneration) and 2. Convention 111 (On Discrimination in Employment and Occupation) and Bangladesh

has ratified these two conventions. As a ratifying state, Bangladesh is to make national laws to implement the provisions of these conventions, he added.

In highlighting the issue of gender discrimination at the workplace, Mr. Khan referred to a recent report that has come out on the occasion of International Women's Day. Quoting from the report, he stated that women's employment has increased all over the world but compared to men, women are at more vulnerable positions i.e. lowly-paid jobs. And according to this report, he further stated, 60 per cent of world's working poor are women which shows how serious is the level of gender discrimination at the workplace across the world. In case of Bangladesh, he observed, the scenario is not different. He stated that according to the report of the Bureau of Statistics, 79 per cent of the labour force of Bangladesh is engaged in the informal sector and majority of the workers in the informal sector are female such as unpaid family workers, home-based workers or other categories of workers. Such statistics, he noted, depicts what is the real scenario of gender discrimination at the workplace in Bangladesh. He further pointed out that there are some practices that themselves are discriminatory which badly affect the prospect of better paid-jobs for women.

However, Mr. Khan concluded his remarks on a positive note saying that the ILO hopes that through various activities at various levels by the government, by the employers themselves, by the unions, the issue of gender discrimination at the workplace could be addressed. Therefore, he urged all concerned to come forward to promote gender equality at the workplace. He hoped that participants would learn new issues and concepts from the deliberations of the training workshop and they could contribute to the promotion of gender equality at their workplaces in their own ways.

Mr. Amin Sharif, representative of Ministry of Labour, Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in his remarks stated that during the late twentieth century, the issue of gender equality became the major issue on the global agenda. He observed that GoB is very much concerned and sincere about the advancement of women and gender equality. The constitution of Bangladesh, he noted, has ensured the equal rights of all citizens and prohibits all sorts of discrimination on the basis of sex in its articles: 27 and 28. Mr. Sharif further said that GoB has also reconfirmed its commitment to women's advancement by signing and ratifying various international instruments. For example,

GoB ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. GoB is also a signatory to the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA). As part of its commitment, GoB has established a national council for women's development in 1995 under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and it has also adopted a national policy for women's advancement within the framework of CEDAW. Moreover, as a follow-up of the PFA, GoB has formulated a national plan of action. Finally, he stated, GoB has ratified seven ILO core conventions including conventions 100 and 111. Both of these conventions have specific aims at promoting gender equality at the workplace, he noted. He concluded his remarks by hoping that the workshop would be fruitful and participants would be benefitted very much.

Mr. Obaidur Rahman Khan, Vice President of Bangladesh Employers' Federation, in his remarks observed that in the globalized business scenario, social issues like gender equality, child labour, decent working conditions and environmental concerns etc. now feature prominently in corporate plans and policies. The empowerment of women is thus of vital importance, noted Mr. Khan.

As far as the participation of women in economic activities is concerned, he said, Bangladesh has been experiencing a positive trend over the years. Women's participation in the Ready-made Garment (RMG) sector has been phenomenal and some other major sectors are also following this trend, he added. And in narrating the role played by Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF) in this respect, Mr. Khan stated that BEF has long been promoting this trend at entrepreneur, executive, and employee levels. Few years back, he further noted, this federation collaborated with the ILO in the implementation of a regional project titled, "*Project for Promotion of Women in Private Sector Activities through Employers' Organizations.*" Under the project, a series of activities were conducted which aimed at promoting gender awareness and equal opportunity policies at the enterprise level. These included recruitment, promotion and involvement of women in decision making process which should be purely based on talent, skill development without discrimination.

Mr. Khan went on stating that many companies in Bangladesh are practicing gender equality in recruitment, training, staff-utilization, promotion etc though they have no

written down gender-equal policies. The BEF, he said, in principle would like to see a further increase in the awareness in gender equality in every sphere of the society in general and at the workplace in particular. He expressed strong commitment of his federation to this issue saying that it shall continue efforts to promote gender issues and equal opportunity policy at the workplace. However, he put emphasis on the role of the government in promoting and ensuring gender equality at the workplace saying, 'we believe that to eliminate discrimination against women and establish rights and equal opportunities, the government should play a major role and ensure all possible measures to provide conducive atmosphere for women's employment.' He also urged the development partners and international bodies to help create conditions for greater participation of women in economic activities.

At the end of his remarks, Mr. Khan thanked the ILO for organizing the workshop and hoped that through fruitful discussions, a set of recommendations would be generated integrating future course of actions for addressing the issue.

At the outset of his speech, Mr. Mujibur Rahman Bhuiya, Chairman of National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE), observed that sometimes the word 'gender' is wrongly perceived to be related only to women. In clarifying the term, he stated that 'gender' refers to social differences and relations between the sexes (men and women) that are learned, change over time and vary across cultures. Hence, gender is related not only to women rather to both men and women. He further stated that the importance of gender equality is well recognized by the United Nations and the ILO has been trying for long to promote gender equality at the workplace.

In explaining the women's participation in economic activities of Bangladesh, Mr. stated that there are four employment sectors in which both male and female workers are engaged in: 1. government sector, 2. semi-government, autonomous bodies and nationalized mills, factories and industries 3. private mills, factories and industries and 4. informal sector. He said that various studies show that in the government sector, semi-government and autonomous bodies and nationalized mills and factories, the discrimination between male and female workers, though present, are not visible. But in private industries and privately-owned multinationals gender discrimination is

visible. For example, he said, even in times of the current emergency rule, a violent incident occurred over the issue of teasing female workers by the security guards in the United Fiber Industries of Meghna Group. He further observed that in the RMG sector, which employs 20 lakh female workers, the story of discrimination is an established fact. Female workers in this sector are underpaid, bound to work in substandard working environment, forced to accept tough conditions. They have to work even for long hours and even at night. Many factories do not even pay the declared minimum wage to female workers. They are not even regularly paid.

Mr. Rahman noted that at a time when public industrial sector is shrinking and the pace of the growth of private industrial sector is not meeting the expected level, the informal sector has been growing very rapidly employing about 30 million (3 crore) people in activities such as agriculture, shrimp cultivation, fishing, construction and breaking bricks etc. He further said that 65 per cent of people engaged in this sector are women. However, he cautioned that this scenario may be misread as the empowerment of the women. In explaining his argument, Mr. Rahman stated that in reality women are employed in these activities because they can be easily discriminated. They can be employed in substandard working environments, forced to work for long hours, denied from maternal leave, paid lower wages. Above all, they cannot resist strongly against discrimination.

Mr. Rahman very strongly felt that gender discrimination at the workplace should be addressed very strongly without any further delay. He stated that it is said that twenty-first century is the century of the women. The prosperity of the society cannot be achieved leaving the women behind. Therefore, to promote gender equality, government, owners, NGOs, trade unions and other stakeholders should come forward. The male workers should change their mindset and stop the tendency to dominate their female co-workers. At the end of his remarks, Mr. Rahman appealed the government to ratify the ILO Convention 138 so that the rights of the workers employed in the informal sector can be ensured.

## Working Session

After the inaugural session, followed by tea-break, the working session of the workshop began with the introduction of the participants. After the introduction, Ms. Sheepa Hafiza, Director Human Resources, BRAC, stated the objective of the session saying that the workshop was organized to raise sensitivity of employers and employees (workers) on gender equality issues at the workplace.

After stating the objective of the session, Ms. Hafiza made a power point presentation titled “*Promoting Gender Equality at Workplace: Gender Concepts and Related Terminologies*”. At the outset of her presentation, Ms. Hafiza dealt with the concept of gender. Ms. Hafiza defined ‘gender’ as socially constructed roles, responsibilities, privileges, relations and expectations ascribed to women, men, girls and boys. According to her, the concept of gender is created culturally in families and societies and it is not predetermined. It is changeable in terms of time, place and culture and also varies widely within and across cultures and places. On the other hand, she said, ‘sex’ refers to biological differences between women and men which are predetermined by nature. The characteristics of sex are universal across societies and cultures and unchangeable among individuals and societies.

She further noted that manifestations (demonstration) of gender difference can be found in the construction of roles and expectations, identity, responsibilities, valuation/recognition and power relations. In explaining the gender difference in terms of expectation, she said that in our country, a man is generally expected to work outside the house (in the public domain) while a woman is expected to work in the house (in the private domain). Moreover, men are considered to be more powerful than their female counterparts. Thus, she very eloquently explained the gender differences existing in our society.

Mr. Hafiza argued that gender is a concept of development, as well as rights. In elaborating her argument, she stated that development refers to the assurance of access to resources and therefore, without proper redistribution of resources, development cannot be achieved. Citing UN statistics, she said that 60-65 per cent of world’s productive work especially agriculture is carried out by women but their

access to resources is about 1%. Due to this gross inequality, she noted, development cannot be achieved. She further noted that this is again an issue of rights because it denotes that injustice is being done to women.

After discussing the concept of gender and its implications for development, she explained some important terminologies related to the issue. In explaining '*gender awareness*', she said that it is the recognition that development actors are women and men, and that women and men are advantaged and constrained in different ways with implications for women and men having differing needs, interests and priorities. Then, she defined '*gender sensitive*' saying that it refers to having an understanding of the marginalized position of women and consciously challenging the attitudes and behavior that reinforce women's subordinate status. In defining '*gender analysis*' she observed that it is the process to considering the impact that a development program or project may have on women and men and on the economic and social relationships between them. She further noted that key issues for analysis includes: the gender division of labor, access to and control over resources, and decision-making capacity.

In explaining '*gender relations*' she said that '*gender relations*' are relations of women and men that are influenced by gender. This is the way in which a culture or society prescribes rights, roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men in relation to one another. She then explained '*gender stereotypes*' as societal perceptions and value systems that ingrain an image of women as weak, dependent, subordinate, indecisive, emotional and submissive. Women's roles, functions and abilities are seen to be tied to the home.

In defining, '*gender equality*', she stated that it means the equality between women and men which refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. She informed that equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend in whether they are born male or female. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women and other diverse group. She observed that equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

She then elaborated another important concept: '*gender equity*'. In elaborating the concept, she said that gender equity refers to being fair to women and men. She depicted that a gender equity approach provides equal opportunity to women and men so that they can have equal benefit. Recognizing that women usually have unequal opportunity and face many barriers, the promotion of gender equity often involves giving special measures to help women overcome these constraints. She further noted that the goal of gender equity is to create an equal field for women and men. Gender equity leads to gender equality.

After explaining gender equality and gender equity, Ms. Hafiza introduced the term of positive action/discrimination and affirmative action. She stated that this term refers to a coherent set of measures aimed at setting up real equality between men and women in public life (on the labour market, in political life). These measures refer to recruiting, work conditions, to salaries, wages and payment methods, vocational training, career development, to the access to decision-making positions. She went on saying that positive action works on increasing the feminine quota in public life areas in order to improve their role in the society, diminishing the *de facto* inequality between men and women. She also mentioned that as long as reality produces inequalities, positive action is necessary for decreasing the artificially created gap between women and men.

In defining, '*gender division of labor*' Ms. Hafiza said that it is basically the socio-cultural assignment of tasks on the basis of gender. For example, women are considered to do work such as cooking, rearing children etc while men are considered to do work outside the house. She then explained the term '*conditions*' saying that *conditions* can be defined as immediate or basic necessities (water, shelter, food, income and health care) within a specific context. These are the needs that women and men themselves will not most often identify as priorities. Women often have different practical needs gender practical needs (GPN) than men, based on their different household roles. For example, at the workplace, female worker may need a day-care centre. She said that addressing GPNs have to do with improving condition of one's life. She then explained another related term: '*position*', which refers to the relative status and oppression of a disadvantaged group within society, such as the

poor compared to the not-poor, or women compared to men, or poor women compared to poor men. Addressing these interests, she went on explaining, have to do with increasing status, ending oppression, and increasing capacities and opportunities for the disadvantaged group to achieve greater equality. Thus, on the basis of *position* there emerges another concept known as '*gender strategic interests*' (GSI). Ms. Hafiza pointed out that strategic interests include the structures, attitudes and practices in society that perpetuate the inequalities. Responding to the practical needs of both women and men is essential and a pre-requisite to addressing strategic interests, she added.

Ms. Hafiza then explained the term, '*gender issues*' saying that they include issues, concerns and problems arising from the different roles played by women and men as supervised and supervisee as well as those that arise from the questioning of the relationship between them. After that she explained the term, '*gender disaggregated data*'. She said that it is the statistical information, which differentiates between men and women. This allows one to see where there are gaps. For example, gender disaggregated data shows that in Bangladesh women suffer more from mal-nutrition than men.

At the end of her presentation, Ms. Hafiza explained another important term: *sexual harassment/ Jouno hoirani*. She noted that this is one of the most common violences against women at the workplace. In defining, '*sexual harassment*' she said that it refers to the sexual abuse manifesting outside an intimate relationship. She pointed out that unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, sex-based messages from the employer or the colleagues, offence, humiliation, inappropriate comments constitutes sexual harassment. Regarding the implications of such violence, she commented that submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

### *Open Discussion:*

After the presentation of Ms. Hafiza, the floor was made open for comments and queries. Many participants actively took part during this open-floor discussion by commenting and asking questions. Taking the opportunity, a participant commented that it is a fact that women are discriminated. The participant stated that this could be addressed by developing personality. For example, if a woman acquires strong personality, people would give it a second thought before teasing her. To develop such strong personality, the participant observed, education can play a big role and it is encouraging that the rate of female education has been on rise. Taking the cue from this participant, another participant opined that education is a fabulous recommendation. Another participant said that even micro-credit NGOs sometimes discriminate women. In favour of his argument, he cited an experience of his life saying that a micro-credit organization deprived a woman of loans on the ground that she would not be able to pay installments as she was pregnant. The participant then made a query as to why men are discriminated in terms of micro-credit loans as they are given only to women in most of the cases. Another participant who was an employee of a multinational company said that according to his company's leave rules, an employee should inform the management within three days in case of unexpected absence. But, he said, sometimes women do not follow this on the ground that they were not able to inform because they are women. He further said that these women also use their "being women" as an excuse for being late for office.

In response to these queries and comments, Ms. Hafiza said that a woman having strong personality is an exception and she wanted to deal with the issues of the ordinary people not the exceptional cases. In response to the question whether men are discriminated in terms of access to micro-credit loans, Ms. Hafiza observed that different NGOs have different goals and therefore their target groups are different. Moreover, women are given micro-credit loans in order to bring equality since they are poorest of the poor. With regard to the comment made by a participant regarding the use of "being women" as an excuse for being late for office and violating leave rules, Ms. Hafiza said that women may have special kind of constraints but she cautioned that such constraints should not be used as an excuse to get extra advantage.

### **Identification of gender related issues at the workplace:**

After the open-discussion was over, Ms. Hafiza divided the participants into eleven groups and asked each group to identify gender related issues at the workplace. The issues that these groups identified are given below.

#### **Group: 1**

Group 1 identified following issues:

1. Negative attitude towards women
2. Lack of awareness among women about their rights.
3. Not giving adequate importance to gender issue.
4. There is a mind set that women are less capable.
5. Women have to work at night but no transportation facilities are offered by the company.
6. Non-cooperation between men and women and
7. Absence of respect for co-workers.

#### **Group: 2**

Group 2 pointed out the following problems facing women at the workplace:

1. Social/negative attitude,
2. Misinterpretation of religion for justifying discrimination.
3. Absence of policies regarding mother's rights. For example, a participant stated that she had a breast-feeding baby and therefore she had to go to her house during office hours to feed her baby and her management allowed her to do so but it did not have any rules/policies in place for this purpose.

#### **Group: 3**

Group 3 found out the following problems:

1. Timing constraints for women—absence of flexi-timing.
2. Working long hours,
3. Shifting duties at night,
4. Preference of men during recruitment,
5. Gender division of work (for example in banks women are employed for petty cash handling).

**Group: 4**

Group 4 identified the following problems:

1. Men's networking. In explaining the issue a participant said that her male colleagues went shopping with their boss after office hours and thus they could become inmate with the boss and managed extra facilities for them. And women workers cannot do such things and thereby they face discrimination.
2. Negative mind-set regarding the women's capability

**Group: 5**

Group 5 identified the following gender related issues at the workplace:

1. Dress code. Since no specific dress code is maintained, male workers sometimes stare at the female workers and tease them if they wear different sorts of dresses.
2. Management of (male & female) workforce. The ratio of male & female workers is hugely imbalanced even at the managerial level. Therefore, the interests of female workers very often remain neglected.

**Group: 6**

Group 6 identified the following gender related issues at the workplace:

1. Special consideration for pregnant women because they sometimes feel sick even before they become entitled to get maternity leave.
2. Sexual harassment.

**Group: 7**

Group 7 identified that the bulk of the workers in garment factories are women but the owners do not establish day-care centres for the children of these female workers.

**Group: 8**

Group 8 identified the negative mind set of the management regarding women's capability as the biggest problem facing the woman at the workplace.

**Group: 9**

Group 9 identified the following gender related issues at the workplace:

1. Discriminatory policy for pension. Women are asked whether they will marry again or not to be eligible for the pension of their husband.

2. For compliance, issue of female workers working at late hours is not recognized and therefore they are deprived of facilities.

**Group: 10**

Group 10 identified the following gender related issues:

1. Separate toilet for women working in government sector,
2. Paternal leave,
3. No breast feeding facilities and
4. Female officials are deprived of foreign training.

**Group: 11**

Group 11 identified that there is a lack of gender friendly recruitment policy and therefore women participation in formal job sector is low.

**Planning way forward for formulation of organization-specific guidelines**

After the lunch, participants were asked to make specific recommendations to address gender-related issues identified in the previous session. For this purpose, the participants were again divided into four groups. After the presentation of recommendations by each group, there were open floor discussions. The issues and recommendations of each group were as follows.

**Group: 1**

*Issues:*

1. Absence of budget for Day Care Centre or rest room,
2. Discrimination for promotion,
3. Discriminating policy for pension,
4. Compliance issue vis-à-vis female workers working at late night,
5. Separate toilet for government officials,
6. Paternal Leave,
7. No breast feeding facilities and
8. Female official are deprived of foreign training.

*Recommendations:*

1. Implementation and monitoring of government law and informing concerned department in the labour ministry.

2. Pension rule should be revised.
3. Promotion should be fair and based on performance.
4. Ensure Transport facility/ Improve working environment. Monitoring of violation of law.
5. Separate toilet facility should be improved by local arrangement at the workplace.
6. Minimum 1 month of paternal leave.
7. More opportunity for foreign training for women.

*Open Discussion:*

During the open-floor discussion, Ms. Hafiza said that flexi-timing for the women working for long hours should be ensured besides the assurance of transport facility. A participant who worked at the Hotel Sheraton stated that her management ensures flexi-timing and transport facility. The driver is asked to drop the female employees right in front of their houses otherwise he (the driver) would be punished. During this open discussion, two participants got engaged into a debate over the issue of whether women should be allowed to work at night under the existing ILO conventions. In response to their arguments, Ms. Hafiza stated that it is the reality that women who work at night may be compelled by poverty and we should encourage the companies to provide them transportation and ensure their safety at the workplace.

**Group: 2**

*Issues*

1. Negative attitude,
2. Lack of awareness about the rights of the woman,
3. Not giving importance to gender issue,
4. Less capable –Mind set,
5. Transportation for night shift work,
6. Non cooperation between men and women,
7. Absence of respect for each other,
8. Social/ negative attitude,
9. Misinterpretation of religion,
10. Absence of policies regarding mother's rights.

*Recommendations:*

1. Counseling for negative attitude.
  - Deterrent action taken in a positive manner.
  - Primary, Secondary education –module at school level.
  - Specific policies for deterrent action.
2. Creating forums, organizing seminars and involving media, Ministry of Information and related authorities to implement awareness programmes.
3. Management should set policies and implement in reality. Involvement of employers, workers and employees (A tri-partite body can be established) should be ensured.
  - Support and monitored by CBA (Trade Unions/Collective Bargaining).
  - As per Convention 87 and 98 freedom of association and bargaining collectively.
  - Shortage of inspectors should be overcome.
4. Grooming and self development initiative to improve competencies.
5. Security measures from employers for night shifts or late hours works.
6. Implementation of Code of conduct by the supervisors in charge.
7. The value of respect should be incorporated in the education from primary level.
8. Strict supervision.
9. Separate prayer room and toilets for female employees.
10. Involvement of CBA or trade unions to establish mother's rights.

*Open Discussion:*

A participant said that at present it seems that our values are eroding such as respect for others. Therefore, she emphasized that primary education should be focused on developing such values. Another participant opined that grooming at all levels is important to sensitize people for gender related issues. She opined that counseling could be a better way to sensitize people regarding gender issues at the workplace. Another participant observed that family can play a big role in making people gender sensitive.

### **Group: 3**

#### *Issues:*

1. Discrimination regarding overtime.
2. Comments like, 'you, women talk too much'.
3. Lots of problems arise due to a small number of female workers.
4. Discriminatory policies (for example, medical allowances).
5. Emergency rule is used as an excuse for discriminatory practices.
6. Recruitment policies do not attract women.

#### *Recommendations:*

1. Overtime will be given according to Bangladesh labour law. Strengthening inspectors of dept. of factory inspection.
2. Awareness creation,
3. Equal rights should be ensured and companies should address gender related issues as part of their 'corporate social responsibility'.
4. Find out root causes,
5. Equal opportunity for all.

#### *Open Discussion:*

During the open discussion a participant opined that the inspection of factories by the governmental regulatory body should be made mandatory so that workers get the facilities including overtime covered by the existing law. In response, another participant pointed out that the inspection of factories is mandatory under the existing law. But the concerned authority is averse to inspection. Taking cue from him, a representative of dept. of inspection of factories stated that his department has a separate monitoring cell with this regard and it regularly inspects factories. However, he admitted, it has manpower constraint. For example, it has 130 inspectors for about 12,000 factories located in Dhaka and its adjacent areas. In this regard, another participant recommended that the inspectors should be trained to enhance their efficiency.

## **Group: 4**

### *Issues:*

1. Timing constraints for women—absence of flexi-timing.
2. Working for long hours,
3. Shifting duties at night,
4. Preference of men during recruitment,
5. Gender division of work.
6. Men's networking,
7. Dress code,
8. Imbalance in male & female workforce even at the management level,
9. Special consideration for pregnant women even before their maternal leave
10. Sexual harassment.

### *Recommendations:*

1. Making specific policies for flexi-timing and understanding responsibilities.
2. Transport facilities should be provided and safety in the workplace should be ensured for those who work for long hours and at night.
3. Maintaining quota, targeting female persons in recruiting policy and developing skills of female workers by training are some steps to address the issue of preference of men given during recruitment and the practice of gender division of works at workplaces.
4. To address the issue of men's networking, there is a need to develop awareness about informal networking.
5. Dress code issue to be addressed.
6. Change recruitment policy to create equity at the managerial level in order to address the issue of imbalance in male and female workforce and even at managerial level.
7. Implementation of labour laws properly and participation of higher management in gender equity programs should be ensured to ensure the issue of special consideration for pregnant woman.
8. To address the issue of sexual harassment, the following steps were recommended: awareness building, establishing co-operational relationship and advocacy programmes.

### *Open Discussion:*

To address sexual harassment at workplaces, a participant recommended that there should be a trade union in each factory which will look after the issues related to workers' interests. However, he commented, above all there is a need to have a change in mentality. Another participant opined that advocacy can play an important role in this regard. A participant asked why women will be given privileges if our slogan is 'equal opportunity for all'. In response, Ms. Hafiza stated that to ensure equality, some equity measures are needed and giving privileges to women are considered to be such equity measures. Citing from a study, she further noted that unless pro-active measures are taken, it would take about 347 years more to ensure gender equality. In exemplifying equity measures, she stated that the companies may encourage female applicants to apply and give special trainings to junior female workers so that they could be employed at the senior level. Later, a participant asked as to how corporate sector whose interest is profit maximizing could be made interested in addressing gender-related issues. In response, Ms. Hafiza said that the issue is related to the goal and policy of the company concerned. However, she said that in recent times the concept of 'corporate social responsibility' has been developing and companies can be convinced that addressing gender related issues at the workplace is part of its 'corporate social responsibility'.

### **Feedback:**

After the presentation of recommendations and open discussions, participants were requested to give feedback on the workshop. During the feedback session, a participant commented that to explore the issue of gender in depth, the duration of the workshop should have been extended. She stated that it should have been two-day long. In response, Mr. Shahabuddin Khan of ILO stated that it is the first workshop of its kind organized by the ILO Dhaka office. Therefore, Mr. Khan said, they were not sure about the responses of various constituencies to such programmes and for this reason they restricted it to one day. However, he hoped that the ILO would organize at least two-day long workshop on the theme in future. Another participant opined that some ILO conventions are very much related to the rights of workers and to make them understood, there is a need to have legal experts on the panel. In response, Mr. Khan said that the workshop was not about the conventions rather it is on gender

promotion and therefore there were no legal experts as resource persons in the workshop. Another participant commented that it would be better if the ILO could give the participants the necessary reading materials in advance so that they could prepare themselves for the workshop concerned. Another participant opined that the ILO should ask companies/organizations concerned to send both a male and a female representative to the workshop so that both male and female workers can learn the gender issue.

After the feedback by the participants, Mr. Khan concluded the workshop by extending his cordial thanks to the participants and assuring them that the ILO is ready to extend its support to any kind of activities related to promoting gender equality that may be initiated by the participants' enterprises.

**Annex: I**  
**Workshop on**  
**Promoting Gender Equality at the Workplace**  
**Date: March 29, 2007**  
**Venue: BRAC Inn, BRAC Centre, Dhaka**

**Programme**

**Inaugural Session:**

9:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m.	Registration of Participants
9:30 a.m.	Address by Director, ILO Dhaka
9:40 a.m.	Address by Government's Representative
9:50 a.m.	Address by Employers' Representative
10:00 a.m.	Address by Workers' Representative
10:10 a.m.	Tea Break

**Working Session:**

10:30 a.m.	Share session objective and introduction
10:45 a.m.	Understanding Gender and its relevance at the workplace
12.15 p.m.	Identify gender related issues at the workplace
1.15 p.m.	Addressing Gender—Workplace issues: Getting Perspectives of ILO Constituents
1.45 p.m.	Lunch Break
2.30 p.m.	Planning way forward for formulation of organization-specific guidelines
4.30 p.m.	Tea Break
4.45 p.m.	Participants feedback on the workshop
5.15 p.m.	Review and Closing

## Annex: II

Sl no.	Name & organization with designation
1	Habib Ullah Vice President, Bangladesh Trade Union Songho.
2	Shahida Parveen Shikha Office Secretary, Bangladesh Trade Union Kendro.
3	Benziree Sultana BGMEA
4	Rashidul Hasan, Executive, HR, Square Pharma.
5	Wing Commander Gaffar (retd.) HR manager, Transcom Electronics Ltd.
6	Rokshana Chowdhury Assistant Director of Labour
7	Feroza Yasmin
8	Salina Akhter Senior Executive, BGMEA
9	Sonia B. Kabir Women Entrepreneurs' Association
10	Md. Tariqul Islam, Sr. Admin Officer, Knit Asia Ltd.
11	Rabaka Sultana Welfare Officer, Knit Asia Ltd.
12	Md. Mahbubur Rahman Personnel Officer (in-charge) Consumer Products Ltd.
13	Md. Omar Faroque DGM, Consumer Products Ltd.
14	A. A. Muktar Khan
15	Iffatara Shely
16	Razequzzaman, SLF
17	Abdur Razzak

	Manufacturing Manager, Sanofi-Aventis.
18	Kamrun Nahar Dhaka Sheraton Hotel
19	Habiba Afrin Dhaka Sheraton Hotel
20	Zamil Ahmed
21	Monami Haque Mediacom Ltd.
22	Nazmul Huq Dy. Chief Inspector of Factories & estab. Dhaka Division
23	Farada Khatoon Asstt. Chief Inspector of Factories
24	Md. Mominul Ehsan Head of HR, Apex Adelchi Footwear
25	Nasrin Akter BGMEA
26	Amin Sharif Ministry of Labour and Employment
27	Md. Samsul Islam Singer Bd. Ltd.
28	Dolly Hossain BMSF
29	Md. Shahidullah Badal BMSF
30	Taufik Imam Social Reporting Manager BATB
31	Shamima Sultana Bari Asstt. Director of Labour Dept. of Labour
32	Ms. Nargis Jahan BJSD
33	Rubina H. Farouq WEA/ Bangladesh Employers' Fedaration

34	Mohiuddin Ahmed Sr. Vice President, Jatiya Sromik Jote
35	Shamim Ara BJSF
36	Fatima Akhter BLF
37	Farjana Shirin A/S, BGMEA
38	Santosh Kr. Dutta Joint Secretary, BEF
39	Rahat Afza Baby BLF
40	Md. Abdur Razzaque Office Secretary, JSTB
41	Jahanara Begum BGMEA