

The Gender Employment Issue

One of the mainstream issues which has become a talking point in the global work environment, is that of gender employment. The discussion which has evolved, concerns itself with participation of males and females in the labour force as it relates to the notion of equality and opportunity in employment. Given the widely held view that women are discriminated against in employment and are often paid less than their male counterparts for doing the same job, the discussion has gained currency. With the evident increase in the number of women being employed in various employment sectors, the charge of the marginalization of women in society, based on the claim of the discrimination of women in employment, is now a subject of challenge.

It may be accurate to state that in the past, women often had less access to productive resources, education, skills development and labour market opportunities than men in many societies. In this contemporary era, this has drastically changed as women now have equal access to education and skills development opportunities, which enhance their chances of higher employability. Whereas this generally applies within progressive westernized societies, the same cannot be said of some societies in other parts of the world. In the case of such societies woman are still ascribed to the traditional role as housewives or domestics, or are deemed best suited for jobs in agriculture. The problem that surfaces here is the tardiness or reluctance of these societies to change the status quo. The extent to which this obtains, has been summarized by the conclusions drawn by experts, who expressed the opinion that in the developing world, women continue to form a large majority of the world's working poor, earn less income, and are more often affected by long-term unemployment than men.

The ILO Convention C111 – Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) 1958, laid the basis for equal opportunity of employment for males and females. Barbados has been a signatory to this Convention since 14 October, 1974. Notwithstanding the ratification of this convention, the evidence supports the fact that male employment predominates over that of females, despite the fact that females make up the larger portion of the population in most societies. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that “Women’s participation in the U.S. labor force climbed during the 1970s and 1980s, reaching 60 percent in 2000. However, in 2010 this figure has declined to 46.7 percent and is not expected to increase by 2018 (DOL 2011).” Based on the available high level of education and training, and the

promotion of equal opportunity, the statistics coming out of the USA as the world's super power, are absolutely interesting.

Data produced by the 2015 Continuous Household Survey in Barbados, which was published in the 17 June, 2015 edition of the Barbados Today Online Newspaper, reported that Barbados had a workforce of 124,300 persons, comprising of 63,500 males and 61,300 females. This represents an absolute minimum disparity. From the two information samples, it would seem that female employment has gain currency.

What now can be said about the matter of equal pay? In 1951, the ILO adopted the Convention 100 – Equal Pay Remuneration. This convention speaks to the right to equal pay without any discrimination on the grounds of gender. This convention was ratified by Barbados on 19 September, 1974 and has been enforced. This question of unequal pay is therefore not expected to be an issue. Other Caribbean countries which are signatories to the convention are Trinidad & Tobago, Antigua & Barbuda, St. Lucia, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti and Jamaica.

It is a matter of interest that the USA is not a signatory to ILO Convention III. This is extremely interesting since the USA promotes the rights and freedoms of the individual. According to the ILO, equality in pay has improved in the USA since 1979 when women earned about 62 percent as much as men. In 2010, American women on average earned 81 percent of what their male counterparts earned (BLS 2010; DOL 2011).

Based on the fact that some 172 countries have ratified ILO Conventions #III and 100, this would lead to the conclusion that the gender employment issue should not be major subject of the day. The fact that it still remains cause for concern, seemingly has to do with whether these Conventions are being applied and/or observed.