

»» Gender equality: Vocational training can serve as a central lever



No. 31, 18 August 2016

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More girls and women than ever before have access to primary education and the gender gap is closing in secondary education as well, albeit much more slowly. Successful education policies have helped women constitute 40% of the global labour force in the formal sector.

Persistent gender discrimination in the labour market

Nevertheless, there are still considerable differences in the allocation of work and pay between the sexes, especially in the labour market: What remains unchanged is that women worldwide perform the largest share of unpaid and informal work, are less common in the upper hierarchies of businesses and earn on average about 24% less (for equal work) from a global perspective.

As these differences are primarily the result of private sector decisions made in the labour market, they are difficult to address directly through official development cooperation.

Suggestions for eliminating discrimination in the labour market

Deeply rooted social norms, role model structures and unequal power relations are defining factors for the differences in the labour market. These steer women and men into different kinds of occupational activity. For women, this often creates an obstacle to working in men-dominated jobs with higher earning potential.

These determining norms usually show high levels of consistency in terms of time. However, looking at the changing role and perception of women in modern industrial states demonstrates that such factors can sometimes adapt relatively quickly to changing conditions and social and economic needs, and that the labour market often plays a central role. Gender equality also pays off from an

economic perspective: The massive economic potential can be observed in the OECD countries where 50% of the economic growth of the past 50 years can be attributed to improving equality in education and employment.

Voluntary commitments by companies for the professional advancement of women in developing countries have shown little effect so far and there is little political support for heavy regulatory intervention (e.g. minimum quota for women's representation at the workplace), their disputed effectiveness and enforceability notwithstanding. Therefore, increasing job opportunities for women via improved vocational training is seen as a possible way forward by using market-based operating principles to move companies to recruit more women in more high-skilled occupations.

Improving women's access to vocational training with appropriate offers

Women are dramatically under-represented in vocational training institutions: they only account for 8% of vocational training graduates (World Bank, 2016). In some cases this is due to the admission criteria and it is not uncommon for the traditional roles to cause women to ask for these training programmes less than men. This can partially be remedied by awareness and recruitment campaigns tailored to women.

However, an important obstacle is that existing offers take little consideration of the special needs women have. For instance, women have a higher drop-out rate than men because they have much more difficulty attending training sessions on a consistent basis due to family obligations or due to lack of financial support. Possible solutions include scholarships, girls' dormitories and childcare facilities.

Training promotes gender equality with many parallel impact channels

Promoting vocational training for women increases their chances on the labour market significantly. Empirical studies show that this is also linked positively with a number of other developmental side effects such as the disruption of traditional role models through the exemplary role of working women, social recognition/empowerment and declining birth rates. Not least because of the numerous synergies it provides, vocational training is considered a particularly effective approach to promoting gender equality as a part of international development cooperation.

Promotion of vocation training for women can hamper discrimination

Gender-based discrimination in the labour market is difficult to address directly through official development cooperation, but the promotion of vocational training is a very effective indirect way to reduce inequalities, which also has many positive side effects on gender equality in the broader sense.

This finding is also reflected by the Elmau Summit Declaration (2015), where G7 countries have set a goal to significantly improve women's and girls' access to vocational training in developing countries. ■