



Beyond Moral Justification

From The Just Jobs Report Series

Isha Vij and Sabina Dewan December 2010

Introduction to the series by John Podesta and Sabina Dewan

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

Creating “just jobs” for women in addition to men is about more than morality and rights—it is fundamental to broad-based economic growth. Harnessing women’s power is critical to generating new sources of aggregate economic demand to power the global recovery. Ensuring just jobs for women is essential to creating a level playing field in labor markets worldwide to prevent countries from leveraging poor labor practices for economic gain. And if done well, it will play a vital, long-term role in enhancing global economic and political stability.

Women today constitute 40 percent of the 3 billion employed people around the world.¹ What’s more, “nearly half (48.4 percent) of the productive potential of the female population remains unutilized (compared to 22.3 percent for men).”² Our global economy cannot be viable without harnessing the productive capacity of such a significant share of the world’s population.

Unfortunately, the recent economic crisis makes it even more challenging for developing countries to achieve gender parity—when men and women have equal access to economic opportunity and outcomes in education, in the transition from school to work, and in the labor market. Export sectors such as apparel suffered large cuts in employment as the economic contagion spread, which hit women particularly hard because they constitute a major part of the workforce in developing countries.

When women get laid off from formal employment they are more likely to enter informal employment as domestic workers or in family businesses. But when the informal economy is then flooded with displaced workers, this leads to overcrowding in an already competitive informal market. This exacerbates the susceptibility of women to seek employment in unsafe and unhealthy conditions, participate in riskier informal migration, or fall victim to other forms of exploitation including sex trafficking.

Policy makers at the international and national levels must recognize that the global recovery cannot be powered without ensuring that women in developing nations, in addition to men, enjoy better living standards that ultimately rebound to benefit other countries as well. The world needs these women to ensure the well being of their children, families and communities, to be protected against labor exploitation, and to serve as consumers helping to promote global aggregate demand.

To move forward national governments in the developing world, advanced economies that provide financial and technical assistance to developing countries and multilateral financial institutions must take active measures to rectify the gender imbalances and empower women through:

- Gender-responsive budgeting
- Social safety nets that are targeted to protect women
- Better education and skills development for girls, especially in new growth sectors such as the green economy
- Technical and financial assistance to establish better gender disaggregated data for developing country labor markets

In the pages that follow, we will examine the economic conditions that require global leaders to rally around these recommendations to deliver just jobs to women, focusing on the efforts that should be taken in particular by the leaders of the Group of 20 developed and developing nations. We then examine more closely the gender imbalances that threaten the livelihoods and future prosperity of so many women in the developing world, contrasting these trends with those in the developed world. We then explore the consequences of these imbalances and present a set of policy recommendations that will help address these imbalances, promoting tangible progress on the aims articulated by the international community.

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