

## Female Workers in the Midst of Crisis and Technological Change

### Editorial

Female Workers in the Midst of Crisis and Technological Change

*Atnike Nova Sigi*

### Articles

Strategy for Abolishing Barriers to Women Labor Force Participation

*Tendy Gunawan*

The Lack of Attention to Lactation Needs in Media Companies

*Afwan Purwanto Muin, Marina Nasution & Widia Primastika*

Rethinking Strategy for Gender Equality in Trade Unions

*Indrasari Tjandraningsih*

Analyzing 'Working from Home' as 'the New Normal' for Working Women from the Perspective of Feminism

*Dewayani D. Savitri & Atnike Nova Sigi*

A Firmative Approach in Strengthening Women's Access to the Information and Communication Technology's Vocational Training

*Tauvik Muhamad, Cornelia Hiranania Wiryasti & Eka Novitasari*

Advancing the Agenda of the Confederation of Trade Unions on the Prevention of Sexual Violence in the World of Work in Indonesia

*Atnike Nova Sigi*

### Profile

Ida Fauziyah: The Importance of Intensified Curative, Protective, and Non-Discriminatory Policy to Boost Women's Participation in the Labour Market

*Abby Gina*

### Interview

Joni Simpson: The Ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment Provides Ground for Improvement to the World of Work for Everyone

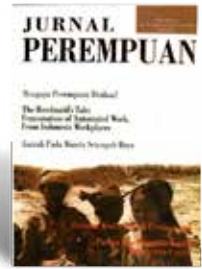
*Atnike Nova Sigi*

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Email: [yjp@jurnalperempuan.com](mailto:yjp@jurnalperempuan.com)

Websites:

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## Female Workers in the Midst of Crisis and Technological Change

The current world of work is being characterized by disruption, where the type of industry that developed since the industrial revolution has changed, both in terms of technology and the form of its industrial relations. This change in the world of work has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has lasted more than a year already. The pandemic, for example, has forced some workers to work from home, with the consequence of increased domestic workload. Meanwhile, the pandemic has adversely impacted various industrial sectors and has caused job loss in certain sectors. For women, these technological change and crisis are aggravated by the economic system and patriarchy that still subordinate women.

The 4.0 industrial revolution has created new types of workers and has made old types of jobs obsolete as they are no longer compatible with market and technological developments. The disruption brings opportunities for those who have access to digital knowledge, skills, and technology; but leaving those without access. Digital gap phenomenon has been disproportionately experienced by many women due to their unequal social and economic position.

As workers, women not only encounter problems as a class or group of workers, but also face challenges due to their gender identity. One of the challenges facing women is the *glass ceiling effect*, which hinders women's career advancement in the workplace. The view that the world of work has masculine character stem from assumptions such as that female workers have lower abilities than male workers. This view can be seen from the separation between men's and women's fields of work. Hence, professions in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are perceived as men's jobs, while professions in the fields of social science, humanities, education, are perceived as women's jobs.

Feminist perspective criticizes the dominant view that separates the economy from domestic work. The world of work is identified with masculinity, while domestic work is considered as feminine sphere with no economic value. This bias gender segregation results in the marginalization of women in the world of work, including in trade union/labor unions.

The historical development of trade unions/labor unions shows an overlook towards female workers as part of the working class. This overlook towards female workers could not be separated from the early development of capitalism, where women were assigned for reproductive work in the household, and (if needed) then would serve as reserve workforces. However, the concept of reserve workforce is questionable as more women enter the workforce.

Increasing female workforce then is also followed by a consequential increase of women in the trade unions/labor unions' membership. However, this does not automatically prompt trade/labor unions to pay attention to gender inequality facing female workers. Trade unions/labor unions initially viewed the working class as a homogeneous social group, which was constructed for men. It was the Marxist and Socialist Feminists who later exposed the intertwined of gender inequality with class issues.

Using separate organizing strategy, women labor movement, sought to strengthen the internal structure of trade unions/labor unions and encouraged them to include gender justice agendas as part of the unions' agenda. This was where the female workers' issues, such as reproductive health, wage discrimination, including sexual violence, began to enter the agenda of trade unions/labor unions, both at the global level, including in Indonesia. At the global level, problems of harassment and violence in the world of work has been recognized with the adoption of the ILO Convention No. 190 of 2019 on Violence and Harassment. Meanwhile, at the national level, trade unions/labor unions also joined the advocacy upon the Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence.

Women's participation in the world of work brings opportunities that can strengthen women's position in society. However, a gender-blind world of work could deepen the existing gender inequalities. In the world of work that experiences change and crisis, feminism continues to strive to take a critical approach towards the exploitative and masculine characters of the world of work.

Along with the publishing of "Female Workers in the Midst of Crisis and Technological Change" edition, the Editorial Team of *Jurnal Perempuan* would like to

announce that starting in 2021, *Jurnal Perempuan* will publish three editions a year. This decision was taken by the Editorial Team with the aim of providing a longer span of time in improving the quality of *Jurnal Perempuan* and

encouraging further works on women's knowledge in Indonesia. Wishing you a fruitful reading. (**Atnike Nova Sigi**)



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**Tendy Gunawan**

Program Officer, International Labour Organization (ILO)  
Country Office for Indonesia and Timor-Leste

### **Strategy for Abolishing Barriers to Women Labor Force Participation**

Jurnal Perempuan, Vol 26 No.1, April 2021, page 1-14, 11 pictures, 2 tables, 19 references

The female labor force participation rate has not moved from 50-55 persen in the last ten years, and this condition has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This study looks at the various challenges for women in entering the world of work, maintaining jobs and building careers, and what strategies stakeholders can take to remove various barriers to women's labor force participation. The strategic recommendations include alternative actions and policies that could be taken by policy makers and companies to remove barriers to women's participation in the workforce. The study is based on literature reviews of various studies and surveys conducted by the ILO in 2010-2020, especially regarding women in the world of work.

Keywords: gender equality; women labor force participation; glass ceiling effect

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**Afwan Purwanto Muin, Marina Nasution, Widia Primastika**  
Aliansi Jurnalis Independen Jakarta

### **The Lack of Attention to Lactation Needs in Media Companies**

Jurnal Perempuan, Vol 26 No.1, April 2021, page 15-24, 31 references

The fulfillment of exclusive breastfeeding is important not only for the babies and toddlers, but also for prevention of breast cancer to mothers and/ or women. Although the government has developed policies related to exclusive breastfeeding, the achievements are still inadequate. One of the problems is the lack of support from the workplace environment. This study focuses on the attention and support of media companies to the lactation needs of breastfeeding women journalists. This qualitative study uses the in-depth interview method and literature study. The results of the study show that media support for the lactation needs of female journalists is still very low. The newsroom must have a special policy that fully supports the lactation needs of journalists both at the office and outside the office. The study also found that full support from the social work environment plays a very important role in the success of a female journalist in giving exclusive breastfeeding.

Keywords: women and journalism; feminism; access to lactation; working women

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**Indrasari Tjandraningsih**

Department of Management, Faculty of Economics,  
Parahyangan University

### **Rethinking Strategy for Gender Equality in Trade Unions**

Jurnal Perempuan, Vol 26 No.1, April 2021, page 25-32, 21 references

The non-strategic role and position of women workers in trade union organization, even in the women-dominated sector, is hardly changed even though the number of women members of trade unions is increasing. Various programs have been carried out to increase the

strategic role of women in trade union organizations but so far have not shown significant results. Based on interviews with officers of gender equality programs for trade unions, union leaders and women and men members and literature studies this paper offers an idea of the need for a non-exclusive approach and actively and proportionally involving men in awareness-raising and gender equality programs for trade unions. This idea is based on the fact that in trade unions gender-related program is always left to or only involves women. The strategy in the gender equality awareness and improvement program that only involves women causes the program's effectiveness to be low because half of the causes of the problem is not involved.

Keywords: women worker; trade union; gender equality

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**Dewayani D. Savitri<sup>1</sup> & Atnike Nova Sigiro<sup>2</sup>**  
Social Inclusion and Gender Specialist (ILO Excoll)<sup>1</sup> &  
Universitas Paramadina<sup>2</sup>

### **Analyzing 'Working from Home' as 'the New Normal' for Working Women from the Perspective of Feminism**

Jurnal Perempuan, Vol 26 No.1, April 2021, page 33-41, 2 pictures, 1 table, 27 references

Working from home, when workers accomplish their duties and works at home, have become an important phenomenon during the Covid-19 pandemic, that have been practiced for more than a year since the Covid-19 outbreak. For working women, working from home have combined two women's duties in one place at the same time, those are their responsibilities as workers, and their responsibilities at homes – including care work, as the common gender role of women. This article aims to explore whether working from home could become a conducive mode of work for women and family's welfare. What factors do the policy makers need to consider, so that working from home would not reproduce gender inequality against women. This article was developed from literature studies on the analysis and policy framework at the global level, and also several existing researches about the challenges that have been faced by working women during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

Keywords: teleworking; working women; Covid-19 pandemic; gender and economy

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**Tauvik Muhamad<sup>1</sup>, Cornelia Hiranía Wiryasti<sup>2</sup>**  
& Eka Novitasari<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Manager/Technical Officer, <sup>2</sup>Project Officer, <sup>3</sup>Program Assistant,  
Industry Skills for Inclusive Growth (InSIGHT-2)/  
Japan Skills Project  
ILO Country Office for Indonesia and Timor-Leste

### **Alternative Approach in Strengthening Women's Access to the Information and Communication Technology's Vocational Training**

Jurnal Perempuan, Vol 26 No.1, April 2021, page 43-54, 10 pictures, 2 tables, 24 references

Despite growing of internet users and digitalizing economy as result of Industry Revolution 4.0, Indonesia still experiences gender-based digital divides, in which, women are left behind in the digital economy and the growing information and communication technology (ICT) sector. To address the issue, alternative action in accessing skills development programs and labor market are crucial. The aim of the study is to observe whether current alternative action for women, have



## Rethinking Strategy for Gender Equality in Trade unions

**Indrasari Tjandraningsih**

Program Studi Manajemen, Fakultas Ekonomi, Universitas Parahyangan Gedung 9 Jalan Ciumbuleuit 94,  
Bandung 40141

i.tjandraningsih@gmail.com

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### Abstract

The non-strategic role and position of women workers in trade union organization, even in the women-dominated sector, is hardly changed even though the number of women members of trade unions is increasing. Various programs have been carried out to increase the strategic role of women in trade union organizations but so far have not shown significant results. Based on interviews with officers of gender equality programs for trade unions, union leaders and women and men members and literature studies this paper offers an idea of the need for a non-exclusive approach and actively and proportionally involving men in awareness-raising and gender equality programs for trade unions. This idea is based on the fact that in trade unions gender-related program is always left to or only involves women. The strategy in the gender equality awareness and improvement program that only involves women causes the program's effectiveness to be low because half of the causes of the problem is not involved.

Keywords: women worker; trade union; gender equality

### Introduction

*"... want to increase the number of female managers because 80 percent of workers are women, because if there many female workers in trade unions, there will be more thoughts and aspirations, and there would be more colorful and this will help other female workers who are still afraid to speak out..." (Ismarlina, a female worker participating in Sekolah Buruh Perempuan/Female Labor School)<sup>1</sup>.*

The bargaining position of Indonesian workers is in general getting weaker, as seen in various cases of violations against workers' rights that lead to industrial disputes and actions, which prove employers' stronger position and government's weak role in protecting the working citizens, even in fulfilling workers' rights as regulated by the laws. The situation highlights the important role of trade unions in advocating the interest of the workers. Although in fact, trade unions have to face more challenges both internal and external challenges, in maintaining their existences. The challenges towards the existence of trade unions particularly are caused by the development of global capitalism strategy and government policies on employment and labor, that become more in favor of capital.

The situation faced by trade unions in Indonesia is also faced by trade unions around the world. The global capitalist system that continues to develop

various strategies to survive and to accumulate amid the increasingly vulnerable economy and the more frequent crises have forced trade unions, whose position become more marginalized and whose power to be eroded. Economic crisis firmly has reduced the number of unions' members due to layoffs. The application of labor market flexibility (Nugroho & Tjandraningsih 2007) and the industrial relation have been developed as a more flexible capital strategy in dealing with the crisis also bring effect on reducing union members because due to the decreasing number of permanent workers. Workers with permanent employment status are the main constituents of trade unions.

Challenges to the existence of trade unions have direct impact to their members. Double impacts are experienced by female workers because apart from their role as workers, which are still not fully recognized in trade unions, female workers-related problems have not been considered as part of the trade unions' issues. There is a tendency within trade unions in prioritizing issues such as wage issues and other government policies as their advocacy but excluding the problems faced by their female members.

As union members, women who work in various occupational sectors that are predominantly women, have not been proportionately represented in term of

position, roles and interest, within trade unions. Only small number of women who hold strategic positions in trade unions. Various efforts have been made to bring women's perspectives and interests into trade unions, but the progress has been very slow. This paper aims to examine and also to offer alternative strategies to bring women into the spotlight in trade unions, through assessment and analysis towards program and educational activities for building capacity and gender equality, that have been organized by trade unions and civil society organizations. In general, a program approach that only focuses on women and does not involve men had become one of the main obstacles that makes the labor empowerment goals are difficult to achieve.

Information provided in this article make reference to literature studies and qualitative approaches made based on conversations and interviews with female and male activists in trade unions.

## Trade unions and Female Workers in Indonesia

### *The Role of Trade unions*

From political science perspective, trade union is a highly important element in democracy. Trade unions that organize the working class, with the number of members and organizational capabilities, according to Rueschemeyer et al. (1992), could provide capacity for workers to balance power between classes in the capitalist system. Especially with the characteristic identified by Valenzuela, that is its ability to disrupt the economy and prevent total repression for democratization (Baccaro et al. 2018). Although Baccaro et al. further wrote that for the Asian context the contribution of trade unions to democratization as mentioned by Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) needs to be reviewed. However, the power of trade union members in terms of their number and organizational capacity serve as the main asset for trade unions everywhere, to give great influence in the democratization process, both in the workplace and in the wider political arena. Discussions about the political role of trade unions in Indonesia can be seen, for example, through the work of Suryomenggolo (2014), Caraway et al. (2015), Triyono (2016), Aditya (2018), Faedlulloh (2019), and Rochadi (2020).

In term of industrial relations' framework, trade unions also have role in creating industrial democracy in the workplace as legitimate voices in decision-making concerning work and employment relations. However, the industrial democracy initiated by Sydney and Beatrice

Webb in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Salamon 2010) needs to be critically addressed due to the question arises whether democracy in the workplace with trade unions as its main element is consistent with the democracy within trade unions. Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2019) stated that several authors who wrote about industrial relations argued that trade unions cannot gain legitimacy as a democratic force unless they can prove that their internal organizations also apply democratic principles. In order to make effective role in promoting democracy, trade unions would need what Regalia identifies as "*the capacity to interpret, decipher, sustain, and redress the demands of the represented, so as to evoke the broadest possible consensus and approval*" (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2019).

Since the moment of reform in Indonesia – which is often interpreted as the opening of democracy and the escape from an authoritarian government – the world of trade unions was one that had them the most. In the last twenty years, with the end of the single union era by President Habibie, with the signing of the ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, and the ILO Convention No. 98 on Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, and the promulgation of freedom of association through the Law No. 21 of 2000 on Trade Unions/Labor Unions by President Abdurrahman Wahid, the number of trade unions have grown rapidly. This is different from the previous period when there was only one union existed, that was the Union of All Indonesian Workers (*Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia/SPSI*). Data recorded by the *industrialall-union.org*, a project on trade unions' empowerment, based on an official data from the Ministry of Manpower, shows that by 2020 the number of organizations at company's level were more than 10 thousand, with a total of 3.2 million members. Those organizations at company's level were affiliated to 111 federations and those federations were affiliated to 16 confederations.

### *Women in Trade unions: Majority but Invisible*

The influential trade unions at national level in Indonesia organize workers in sectors that are predominantly women. However, as the usual situation in the workplace, the high amount of numbers is not necessarily in line with the level participation and strategic role in trade unions. Sociologically, female workers face a multi-layered power structure. The industrialization process that began in the early 1970s was characterized by feminization and urbanization of women who came from poor social classes with low education into

the environment and had to deal with social classes consisting of men who were more educated, powerful, and economically stronger, both at work and in trade unions. This situation immediately put female workers in subordinate position. In an interview to a woman activist who describe her experience when started working in the early 1990s, at that time she always kept her head down, did not dare to look her (male) superior in the eye, and did not have the courage to express her opinions. This condition is still experienced by female workers today and it brings impact to the marginalization of women's interest.

To date, national data of trade union members disaggregated by gender is not yet available. Some of the union federations own membership data based on gender. For unions that organize workers in the predominantly women industrial sector such as garments, shoes, toys, cigarettes, then the percentage of members will be dominated by women, and vice versa. Thus, the majority of union members in those sectors are women. However, it can be estimated that there would be small numbers of women who hold position as leaders, whether in unions at the factory level, at the branch, and federation levels, as illustrated below.

Majority of SPN's members are women (Serikat Pekerja Nasional/the National Trade union. However, out of a total of 600 unions executives, there are only less than 5 percent of them are women, and only 1 woman hold leadership at the regional level (Shanto 2021, interview, 31 March). In Garteks (*Gabungan Serikat Buruh Tekstil*/the Association of Garment Trade Unions), there are 15 chairwomen out of 130 labor union executives (12 percent) at the factory level and 3 chairwomen at the branch level. Garteks has 4 female leaders at company level out of 130 organizations at the company level, and 3 female branch leaders out of 18 organizations (Ary Djoko 2021, interview, 1 April).

Women's marginal position in trade unions has become unchanged global phenomenon. Ledwith (2012) wrote that women subordinate positions in trade unions continues, although there have been many changes with the increasing women's participation in the world of work, and the emergence of concerns towards gender de cits since the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. The situation was mentioned as a story about exclusive masculinized unionism versus demands for inclusive gender politics.

European Trade Union Confederation stated that improving gender balance in trade unions' leadership and in the decision-making structures remains a fundamental

challenge for trade union movement (Ledwith 2012 citing Pilinger 2010).

Women's position as members of trade unions continue to face the same problems such the common violation against workers' rights and also against right to reproductive protection, and experience sexual harassment and discrimination. In trade unions, as illustrated above, women do not hold the top positions nor the strategic decision-makers, instead they hold the traditional positions as implementers such as treasurer, secretary, and education sta . During trade union events, female members hold task as nance o cer (cashier), caterer, host, or carry souvenir trays.

During regular protests of the trade unions and during the commemoration of the International Labor Day, problems faced by female workers have not become dominant issues and demands, as noted by LIPS (Majalah Sedane 2019). Female workers' issues only emerge during the commemoration of the International Women's Day, which celebrated mainly by women and with little participation of men.

Women's marginalization and underrepresentation in terms of numbers, interests, and roles in trade unions have become questioned through various research and perspectives, reveal male domination over trade unions has made the female members invisible from the male. (ILO 2005, Hilmy & Fatma 2011, Subagya et al. 2013, Zuhaena 2015, Nilamsari 2017, TURC 2019).

Women's stagnant participation in the medium and large-scale businesses is re ected in their roles in trade unions. It is important to highlight, that trade unions in Indonesia mostly still concentrate on organizing workers in the formal sector, particularly in the manufacture industry.

### Women's Experiences in Trade Unions

Although at a very slow pace, freedom of association that started twenty years ago has opened up opportunities for roles and voices of female workers through trade unions. Through the struggles of the pioneers on women's rights as trade union members, then the female trade unions' members that raise female workers' interest in trade unions have been gradually emerged. The ght that began twenty years ago by claiming the rights of female members to sit as delegates in union's congress and to change congress' regulation that eliminated women's su rage, while the statute has regulated the legal rights for members to vote and to be elected. The ght was followed by 30 percent of quota

of women attendance required in trade union activities (Lilis Mahmudah 2021, interview, 26 March).

Long before that, one of the initial struggle to raise women's voice was started an activity that was initiated by the late Ari Sunarijati, a female SPSI activist who established Pondok Pekerja Wanita (dormitories for female workers) in Jakarta, Sukabumi, and Surabaya in the early 1990s, and also followed by establishing *Lembaga Wanita, Pekerja dan Anak* (Women, Workers, and Children Institute) as an affiliated organization to the biggest trade union in Indonesia at that time. The objectives of its establishment were to educate female workers about their rights as workers and trade union members, and to prepare women as union leaders (Ashoka.org 2021)<sup>2</sup>. At that time, with only one union controlled by the government, the main objective of the carried-out activities was to prepare potential trade union leaders that genuinely came from the workers group.

The struggle to raise women's voices in trade unions was also carried out by another female activist. Her personal experience to engage with the dominant male unionist activists and placed female activists to serve colleagues because of their gender, triggered her to fight for equality for female workers in trade unions. The occasion where 'women made colleagues for men in public spaces' later became a tool for creating equality in trade unions at company level, by prohibiting female executives from making colleagues for male executives (Endang Rokhani – a lawyer, educator, and motivator for female workers 2021, interview, 30 March).

Another initiative to fight marginalization of women in trade unions was also carried out by a female worker who tirelessly fought to get herself to become women's representative trade union, by continuously learning to understand about unequal gender relations in the workplace and the union. Her personal experiences in facing resistance from male activists in the trade union against her achievement in climbing the union hierarchy ladder, had further strengthened her motivation to raise female workers' problems and interests (Izzah Inzamiyah – an educator of female union members 2021, interview, 29 March).

The initiative is still being undertaken until today because female workers still face the same barriers to get equal opportunities in trade unions. A small survey conducted by the Bekasi Women Trade Unions Committee (*Komite Perempuan Serikat Pekerja Bekasi/ KPPSB*) on 13 March 2021 in commemorating the International Women's Day by targeting female union members, stated that the two main obstacles for women

to hold decision-making positions in trade unions are the views (of men) that women do not have the ability to lead and that women have time allocation problem.

If being conceptualized, women's experiences and the obstacles they face in trade unions are reflection and manifestation of the connection between gender stereotypes, unequal gender relations, and patriarchal culture in society. The ideology that constructs and shapes gender roles have rooted in the society's mindset and quite often in essence or even more become the basis for biased policies, that resulted in policies that put female workers in a weaker position.

In order to remind and to emphasize, gender is a concept as well as an analytical tool towards the view about men and women, both as physical and social construction. Gender, gender relations, and its various elements are the main work of feminism. Feminism itself questions the politically constructed and driven gender relations, and thereby feminist theory requires tools to clarify social and political structures, and show how gender is being produced and reproduced; through gender lens, feminism seeks to examine the assumptions of power, change awareness, see oppression, and action to end it (Arivia 2016).

The social construction towards the point of view about character and role of women have clearly used by men and women in the work place and in unions. In the later development, a clear line between women's issues and men's issues, women's affairs and men's affairs, organization's affairs and women's affairs, work processes affairs and women's affairs.

In the workplace, the distinction between women's affairs and other matters can be illustrated as follows. If there is a problem regarding violation against protection of reproductive rights, such as sexual harassment, it would be almost automatically considered as women's problem or a gender problem, and are not considered as part of K3 issues (*Kesehatan dan Keselamatan Kerja/ Occupational Health and Safety*) nor as work process/procedure problem. Because the violation is considered as women's problem, therefore the female victim has to resolve it herself.

A similar illustration also occurred in trade unions where women's issues are not considered as organizational issues, but rather as specific issues. There is not any trade union that has put sexual harassment's issue as organizational issue, that is institutionally taken up as priority issue, even in unions where the majority of members are women. An exception applies to FSBPI

(*Federasi Serikat Buruh Persatuan Indonesia*/Federation of Indonesian Trade Unions), which takes the issue of sexual harassment a priority agenda of the organization. It is a common phenomenon in trade unions to leave the solution towards sexual harassment problems and the protection of reproductive rights, to be handled by women. It is also a common thing in trade unions' forums that men would be active when discussing general issues; while the discussion shifted into women-related issues, then the time and place are automatically transferred to women. Likewise, in events hosted by external parties, there is some kind of automatic division of assignments for men to attend activities that discuss issues on wages, collective labor agreements, or social security; and for women to attend activities that discuss issues on reproductive rights, sexual harassment, and maternity protection.

The male activists from the SPN (*Serikat Pekerja Nasional*/National Trade Union), KEP (*Kimia Energi Pertambangan* /Chemical and Energy), and FSPMI (*Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal Indonesia*/the Federation of Indonesian Metal Trade Unions) who were interviewed admitted that trade union is a very masculine organisation and still differentiate between organizational issues and women's issues (Shanto, Guntoro, Kahar 2021, interview, 31 March). A masculine organization is characterized by, for example, meeting hours that last until late at night, and meetings that are held out of town for days, and meeting rooms full of cigarette smoke and sexist jokes. The condition would make it difficult for women to optimally participate due to the uncomfortable situation. The existing distinction between women's issues and organizational are already known. Issues that are considered as organizational issues are issues regarding wages, collective bargaining agreements, government's policy concerning employment-related issues such as the Omnibus Law Cipta Kerja, social security, advocacy and litigation. Maternity leave and maternity protection issues are considered as women's issues. According to the male executives, the separation between women's issues and organizational issues partly happen due to the exclusive attitude of women who are perceived as only willing to deal with matters relating to women's reproductive rights, and are reluctant to take part in litigation and advocacy. Women are also perceived to be satisfied to stay in a comfort zone in the women-related department within the organization. For the record, all unions have a women-related department under the organizational structure, and later also established women's committee serve as part of the organizational chapter. Different from the male's point of view about

the comfort zone above, a female branch leader saw that the establishment of women's committee in the union are created as a stage that allow the unions' executive to avoid to deal with women-related issues.

Similar to their female counterparts, male executives also see that women's roles and activities in the unions are driven by factors from within the women themselves, as a boundary made by women to adjust with their status as wives and/or mothers. Those internal factors are recognized by male executives as a result of a patriarchal culture that restricts women's mobility public arena.

### Women's Empowerment Program in Trade unions

Marginalization of women's role in trade unions has been and is being addressed through various gender equality programs organized by trade unions as well as their supporting institutions. These programs are primarily aimed at building female workers' awareness to speak and to address their struggle upon the violations of rights in the workplace, and to open up women's awareness towards their ability in taking important and strategic roles in organizations on an equal basis with men. The temporary affirmative approach or also known as positive discrimination have coloring the programs, since the social reality have place women in unequal position within the society; this approach indeed aims to promote social equality through special treatment to the groups that are socio-economically marginalized. And female workers are one amongst the marginalized group within society.

A female workers empowerment program implemented by the Trade Union Rights Centre (TURC), a non-governmental organization focused on labor rights advocacy, in collaboration with *CARE Indonesia*, in the form of Female Workers' School (*Sekolah Buruh Perempuan/SBP*) for example, aims to increase the capacity of the female union executives at the factory level in using public data for advocacy purposes. SBP participants are all women and the trainers are mostly women. Sustained participation of women in SBP have also faced challenges similar to women's participation in other unions' activities, those are: permission from their families and companies. SBP confirmed that female workers do need to be trained to present themselves and to voice their desires and interests to the public, and to be introduced to workers' rights and rights to fight discriminatory actions from both companies and organizations. SBP's processes also show that although it started twenty years ago, but awareness building process about female workers' rights has to be restarted again.

*Industry All Indonesia Council* that consist of 11 trade union federations, has established a women's committee since the end of 2013, with its main agenda is campaigning for maternity protection. Aside being part of the international agenda related to the ILO Convention 183 on Maternity Protection Convention, it also accommodated reports from female members of a liated federations regarding examinations required to get menstrual leave rights.

The activities of the women's committee of the *Industry All Indonesia Council*, similar to the women's committees in other trade unions, are fully handled by women. Men's participation is very limited and tends to be formal and ceremonial. Otherwise to give *ad hoc* assistance for matters that are considered to be men's affairs, such technical nature and technology-related matters.

Gender training programs in trade unions are designed speci cally for women, and men are not allowed to participate in some of the activities. On the one hand, it is designed to give women the freedom to express their desires and concerns about gender-related issues in a forum where men are not present. On the other hand, this method would further distance men from understanding and awareness towards the unequal of gender relations and it would emphasize the assumption among men about gender issues as women-only concerning matters. What is more important is the assumption that men do not contribute to the existing unequal gender relations. Meanwhile, it is admitted that patriarchal culture is the cause of unequal gender relation.

Gender awareness and equality programs using the affirmative action approach that prioritize women as a disadvantaged group, on the one side, create an exclusive impression, that would further emphasize the separation between women's affairs against organizational affairs, or to exclude women's interests from the organizational affairs. An affirmative action could also negate meritocracy and assume that an achievement or progress is achieved not because of hard work but a privilege – and that could be counterproductive. One of the examples is men's jealousy to women who are given too many privileges to increase their capacity through various special training for women.

An affirmative action is indeed needed to open up space to equalize the playing field, for women against men. However, in the context of female union members, this approach needs to be complemented by other methods and strategies that can eliminate its

counterproductive side. The method principally involves not only female members but also male members, and trade union executives.

The article "*Feminising the Unions*" offers an alternative culture, that is the culture of femininity, which sees female union members as "putting importance on a active relationships rather than the instrumental one; prioritizing social factors over the purely economic factors; making connections between home, work and society; acceptance towards diversity and beliefs that everyone's voice should be heard; disliking formality, hierarchy, and top-down decision-making, as well as the believe towards informality and the importance of grassroots opinions" (Ledwith 2012). Femininity culture grows out of women's lives experiences as caregivers, subordination, and multiple roles in society and in paid work.

Integrating feminine culture in trade unions working culture can be considered to be implement as a way to open up friendly space in organizations that would allow women to be bolder in expressing themselves and their ideas for advancing the organization, thus realizing the principles representation of all and democracy.

A more inclusive approach seems to have found its way. The younger generation of male union members was seen from the unions' executives who were being interviewed as having equal attitude and having more open-mind, and less stereotypical towards gender roles, and therefore they were easier to work with. Similar situation also occurred in England, for example. Based on a research by Edmund Heery and John Kelly, Ledwith (2012) found that young and educated white-collar unions' executives, both women and men, were more supportive to gender-related agendas. According to Heery, as quoted by Ledwith (2012), this group can serve as the locomotive that would improve and would be more involved in efforts to carry out gender equality agenda in negotiation processes. A similar development to the emergence of young trade unions' cadres in Indonesia could open the door to gender equality in trade unions.

Fifteen years ago, the ILO (2006) has conducted research about issues on women and gender with a focus on the marginalization of female workers in trade unions in Indonesia. The research came up with a series of recommendations with priorities for improving the internal side of the organizations. Some of the recommendations including: producing statistical data on representation and participation disaggregated by sex, selecting female executives at all levels, ensuring



women proportional representation in executive bodies, selecting women for tasks with responsibilities in negotiation and establishing women's structure that are connected with decision-making bodies, developing assistance/mentoring programs for young women who have gender leadership potential.

At international level, ILO (2020) in collaboration with several multinational institutions have produced a report on the role of trade unions in achieving gender equality, recommended trade unions, among others, to pursue gender-sensitive collective bargaining, to develop gender equality action plan as a reference for decision-making within the unions, and to audit trade unions' structures and policies from gender perspective, and involve as many members as possible in gender-sensitive activities.

## Conclusion

A patriarchal culture that is intertwined with stereotype gender role is a structural factor that limits women's role in the strategic position within trade unions. This factor shapes trade unions into a masculine organization that are difficult to be adjusted with women's gender roles, and has made women to withdraw themselves from active participation. Because of this factor, the principle of democracy in trade unions could not be fully realized since women's voices as the represented members are not accommodated.

The limited roles of women in trade unions is a reality that has been recognized by both female and male union executives. Organizationally, this limitation ought to be reduced through various education program designed for women, regarding gender awareness and equality, and specific leadership education for women. However, the educational method that separates women from men in reality could reinforce gender inequality and the separation of women's issues from organizational issues.

Ways to design strategies for an inclusive gender equality, that equally involves both women and men, are necessary. Unequal gender relations, which partly stem from patriarchal culture, cannot be resolved only by women, because it would increase women's burden. An affirmative action approach to build women's awareness about their abilities is indeed necessary, but it needs to be complemented with men's awareness that women as members of trade unions hold equal rights.

The exclusive educational approach for women could bring some changes, but it is only in a limited scale. If the education approach and method on gender equality

continue to be applied only to women, the trade unions activists and supporting organizations have agreed, that in the next 10 years, women would remain marginal from the organizational' strategic position.

Initiating an inclusive approach can be started immediately by reviewing ILO report that was made fifteen years ago, because the situation is still very much relevant. In addition, several ideas can be considered carefully, such as to conduct gender equality training for men who hold top position in trade unions, with men as trainers. Targeting top leaders of trade unions in order to raise gender awareness and gender sensitivity would be effective in incorporating issues faced by female workers into trade unions' agenda. Training men with a fully gender-sensitive male trainers, might be more effective, because the message would use men's point of view towards gender issues, and also the trainers' ability to criticize the sexist attitude of the unions' leaders towards the female members. Political will is from the male leaders' positions are needed. Like doing the Tango, the problem of women's limited strategic roles in trade unions must be addressed jointly, by women and men.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Ismarlina's story can be found on the Trade Union Rights Center (TURC) channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDo1e8sTKAg> - Cerita Perubahan Siswa Sekolah Buruh Perempuan Sukabumi, 3 December 2019.
- 2 An interview with the late Ari Sunarijati can be seen on the *Ashoka.org* website at <https://www.ashoka.org/en-id/fellow/ari-sunarijati>, accessed on March 31, 2021.

## AUTHOR GUIDELINES

Jurnal Perempuan (JP) is a quarterly interdisciplinary publication in the English language that aims to circulate **original ideas in gender studies**. JP invites critical reflection on the theory and practice of feminism in the social, political, and economic context of Indonesian society. We are committed to exploring gender in its multiple forms and interrelationships.

The journal encourages practical, theoretically sound, and (when relevant) empirically rigorous manuscripts that address real-world implications of the gender gap in Indonesian contexts. Topics related to feminism can include (but are not limited to): sexuality, queer, trafficking, ecology, public policy, sustainability and environment, human and labor rights/ issues, governance, accountability and transparency, globalization, as well as ethics, and specific issues related to gender study, such as diversity, poverty, and education.

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