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WOMEN AS TRADE UNION LEADERS IN SRI LANKA?

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Editor's Note... ... ...

This contribution to the *LST Review* affirms and supports established literature as well as offers new perspectives in regard to the role and character of women as trade union leaders in Sri Lanka.

Researcher Manori Witharana engaged in a purposeful sampling of trade union women across political backgrounds along with leaders of trade unions, supported by interviews, focus group discussions and a sweep of applicable research on the topic. The empirical findings which emerged as a result are interesting. As she states;

> *In exploring reasons of under-representation of women in trade union leadership positions in Sri Lanka, this study reinforces the fact that women have a low level of representation at leadership levels in trade unions in Sri Lanka. Even in trade unions formed in workplaces with a majority of women workers, women were under represented at leadership levels.*

> *Not a single female trade union member held the position of a General Secretary in a trade union that had male and female members. It was clear that most of the women in executive positions in trade unions in Sri Lanka were either Treasurers or in joint or deputizing positions. The findings demonstrate that women in women's wings and women's committees in trade unions rarely get the opportunity to participate in negotiations. It was also evident that there was little effort by unions to institutionalize gender equality policies.*

The one significant exception to this dolorous trend was the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union (CPWU) which has a female president. The history of this trade union leader is indicative of the hard work that she had to engage in to achieve this position. As Witharana points out, this is a daughter of a plantation worker in the central tea plantation estates who, 'with her inborn leadership qualities, had managed to transform the culture of this union; the CPWU, by rising to its presidency through the formerly male-dominated ranks.'

Her leadership resulted in practical changes within the organisation. Young women gained membership to the union, 50% female membership of plantation committees of

the union was secured and it was agreed that the President and Secretary positions 'must be shared between a male and a female'.

In general however, deeply entrenched stereotyping of women's roles within the trade union culture was evidenced from this study, not only (unsurprisingly) from male perspectives but from some women themselves.

> *When the researcher, during in-depth face to face interviews, asked the interviewees whether they believe they are suitable for a leadership position in your trade union, all the interviewees at once said 'yes' but when the researcher asked for their honest response, at least sixty percent of them stated that they felt 'imperfect' or less skilled for holding leadership positions....*

> *... At least half of the women interviewed seemed to form internalized oppressions around them. In-depth interviews showed that many women did not have the confidence and brazenness to get on to leadership positions. The separation between the public and private spheres, which are distinguished as men's and women's worlds make women lack confidence to take on positions that would lead them to contend with their male counterparts.*

These findings in the current political environment are undoubtedly disturbing given that previous studies on women and governance in Sri Lanka a decade or so ago indicated strong resistance by women to perceived inherent incapacities of this nature.

Witharana's identified barriers to women taking on leadership positions in Sri Lankan trade unions are several. Aside from gender stereotyping, a formidably varied range of obstacles impede womens' leadership positions include imbalanced division of family responsibilities, lack of leadership training for women, non-familiarity with union structures, lack of confidence on the part of women, male-dominated trade union culture and political unionism. As regards the last named, the political infiltration of trade unions is named as a relevant factor militating against gender equitable policies in trade unions.

Her citation of discrimination and gender based violence in this context raises a host of different questions. One finding in this research was that regardless of age, the majority of the female participants surveyed said that they had experienced clear discrimination

at least once within their union. As worryingly, close to half of the trade union leaders interviewed by her accepted the fact that women members are being discriminated by male counterparts. A consequential finding that the women respondents were divided in half by their opinions as to whether women should be passive in their trade union roles to avoid such harassment, is to be expected.

This study concludes with several recommendations. Particular attention is merited in regard to the question as to whether a quota guaranteeing women at least 25% of seats at leadership level would help increase women's participation in leadership positions. Half of the female unionists interviewed agreed with this suggestion. However, as is observed by Witharana, it is undeniable that a quota system alone will not be adequate to promote women's leadership. Accompanying support measures and systemic changes in the trade union culture would certainly be necessary to enhance women's participation in leadership positions in Sri Lankan trade unions.

Kishali Pinto-Jayawardena

From Membership to Leadership...

Obstacles facing women in becoming trade union leaders

*Manori Witharana**

Throughout history, women have continuously and constantly worked. In contrast however women's work has been historically invisible as this is identified to be in the domestic sphere. Decades back, females were considered only as the sexes responsible in 'reproductive work' while males were responsible in 'productive work'. Males were considered as 'bread winners' and were placed in the productive sector. This 'male bread winner' model has made women 'dependent consumers'[1].

In the past, men were paid more in paid employment than women because 'men were supposed to support their families' and men's skills were valued more than women workers' skills and labor. Today however and creditably so, the labor market has become feminized. During the past quarter-century, the rate of employment for women worldwide has risen steeply and is approaching that of men. The long-term increase in the female labor force largely reflects the greater frequency of paid work among women. The modern woman does both productive and reproductive work. A woman's work is not confined to household chores anymore. Working women shoulder the double burden of paid work and the bulk of household responsibilities. In today's world, to reach a minimum standard of living for the household, a woman's financial contribution is very important and therefore, "dual-earner ship" has become the norm in families.

Women in Sri Lanka have thus become the dominant factor not only in terms of population, but also in the economic sphere, by keeping control of the economic machine of the country in their hands. Women are the main pillars of the Sri Lankan economy. According to the Department of Census and Statistics Labour Force Survey data (2011), from 2002 to 2010, the female labour force has grown at almost twice the rate of the male labour force and the female share of the labour force has increased[2]. The Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (2012) reveals that women comprise 31.3%[3] of the economically active population. The increase in Sri Lankan women's participation in the labor force became rapid after the liberalization of the economy in 1977. The first Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in the country was established in 1978 and since then many Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and Industrial Parks (IPs) have been established across

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1 Offen, K. *The Male Breadwinner Model, How a 19th Century Theory Limits Women's Economic Opportunities.* (2009).
2 Excluding Northern and Eastern provinces
3 Excluding Northern and Eastern provinces

the country, with the objectives of attracting foreign direct investments, to earn foreign exchange and to create employment. Approximately, eighty five percent of the workers in FTZs and IPs are females[4]. Systematic information on these work and workers is not available from official government sources or any other reliable source. To be competitive in the international market, productivity has to be increased and the production cost has to be decreased. Yet procedures adopted by employers during the past years to face international challenges and competition have encompassed the reduction of permanent employees through sub-contracting work and offering temporary working arrangements. This makes employment unsteady to employees.

The tactic used to increase productivity is to demand the workers to meet high targets while maintaining high quality. During times of high demand, workers are forced to work long hours to meet targets. Tremendous pressure and long working hours lead to health and safety issues of employees. These conditions, while benefiting employers, are damaging workers' mental and physical health. On the other hand, it is easier to hire and fire temporary employees and the cost is less as these employees will not be entitled to receive benefits such as gratuity.

The FTZs are just one example. Women who work in the plantation sector have their own employment issues. This applies to women workers in all other formal as well as informal sectors. There is a disparity between quantitative increases in female labor force participation and the qualitative augmentation of lives of working women[5]. Along with the increase of the labor force participation rate of females, their vulnerability and exploitation have also increased. Gender discrimination in the workplace persists and gender segregation continues. Working women are often discriminated against because of their sex, marital status or family responsibilities. There are many other problems confronting women as workers; problems their male counterparts do not face. The need for the promotion of gender equality in workplaces is significant with the increasing participation of women in paid work. Because of these reasons, working women are in need of representation and social protection. While recognizing the contribution of female workers to the Sri Lankan economy, it is time to acknowledge and address emerging challenges faced by them.

Trade unions can play a vital role in improving the employment conditions of women and promoting gender equality in employment. However, union bargaining agendas are traditionally centred on male-biased priorities. That is because the leadership does not equitably reflect the membership of unions in Sri Lanka. The important role of trade unions in protecting vulnerable women workers and the promoting of gender equality in the workplace was acknowledged in the Platform for Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995)[6]. This document called on governments and all social actors (including trade unions) to:

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[4] Interview with Anton Marcus, General Secretary, FTZ&GSEU
[5] Working women here are referred to those who are in paid employment
[6] The Fourth World Conference on Women was a major human rights accomplishment for women. It marked the convergence of political and legal processes to underscore, on a global scale, the centrality of human rights to the struggle for equality. The Conference Declaration and Platform for Action is built on a rights framework,

"Recognize collective bargaining as a right and as an important mechanism for eliminating wage inequality for women and to improve working conditions;

Promote the election of women trade union officials and ensure that trade union officials elected to represent women are given job protection and physical security in connection with the discharge of their functions"[7].

Even though there is no proper data available on the percentage of women's participation in trade unions, according to anecdotal information, at least 35% of trade union members in Sri Lanka are women. Yet despite the rising number of women in the labor force, their contribution to the Sri Lankan economy and their participation in trade unions and trade union activities, women are underrepresented in trade union decision making bodies. As long as the leadership composition of a trade union continues to be under representative and the interests of its female membership continue to be marginalized, the basic standards of equality and justice will remain impossible to attain.

There is extensive research conducted on women in leadership in unions in other countries but there is a lack of investigation on women and trade unions in Sri Lanka. A study carried out by the Center for Women's Research (CENWOR) (1998) on women and trade unions focusing on ten trade unions discovered that in a trade union which had a membership of 95% females, decision making was entirely on the hands of males while in another trade union with 75% female members, there were no females in the executive committee. There are a few other studies carried out on women and trade unions in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Center for Development Studies, the Marga Institute in collaboration with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) carried out a study in 1999 on 'Creation and Strengthening of Women's Wings in Trade Unions'. Ranaraja (2003)[8] carried out a study for the International Labour Organization on Barriers to Women's participation in Trade Unions. She has focused on women's participation in trade unions but not on their participation in leadership positions. Kandasamy (2002)[9], a researcher and a female trade union leader in the tea plantations in Sri Lanka carried out a study on 'Women's leadership in Plantation Trade Unions in Sri Lanka-*The Struggle Continues*, for the Institution of Social Development (IDS-Sri Lanka). This study deals specifically with and focuses only on the plantation trade unions and women's leadership. The above studies were carried out at least ten years ago. Therefore the information and data contained therein may be critiqued as being outdated.

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invoking the substance and the language of human rights in every section, and referring specifically to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as to the other human rights treaties.

[7] Strategic objective F.5 - Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination-Actions to be taken- paragraph 178, h, i)

[8] Ranaraja, S., *Barriers to Women's Participation in Trade Unions*. (Colombo: International Labor Organization, 2003).

[9] Kandasamy, M., *The Struggle Continues..., Women's Leadership in Plantation Trade Unions in Sri Lanka*. (Institute of Social Development, Sri Lanka, 2002).

There are no in-depth research studies carried out in Sri Lanka focusing on women in decision making positions in trade unions and the obstacles, barriers that women in Sri Lankan trade unions encounter in entering decision making positions in such trade unions. There is an enduring lack of information, including quantitative data and qualitative analysis, on women's participation in trade union leadership/decision making positions. This study was carried out to experimentally fill in the existing empirical gap on the status of women in participative decision making in trade unions in Sri Lanka. This study investigated the gender dimension of decision making in trade unions, tried to identify obstacles and factors influencing the participation of women in decision making positions in trade unions in Sri Lanka and the relative importance of these factors in determining the accessibility of leadership positions to women in trade unions. Recommendations aimed at enhancing women's participative decision making in trade unions were also identified.

Since the purpose of this study was to identify obstacles women face in attaining trade union leadership positions, this investigation employed a descriptive qualitative approach. It was important to look at each case individually. Ethnography[10] was used in this research to better understand the culture and the perspective of the population. The researcher had extensive contact with the group under study. Face-to-face interviews were used as it enabled the researcher to promptly adjust the interview schedule if necessary and if the interviewee's retorts and reactions suggest the need for further inquiries and analysis in future interviews. Through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) the researcher gained a more in-depth understanding of the respondent's attitudes, beliefs and opinions. Desk research, internet research was largely designed to review existing literature on women in trade unions and their participation in leadership positions.

Local and international publications, journals, research study reports, news articles, presentations by different organisations such as the American Center for International Labour Solidarity (ACILS), Social Sciences Association in Sri Lanka (SSA), the Women and Media Collective (WMC), UN agencies (such as the ILO), bilateral development agencies and academia were widely reviewed and cited. Secondary data was also collected from the selected trade unions, federations and confederations from their union registers and document files, websites and other sources of existing information. This study used purposeful sampling to ensure participants met the required criteria. All the participants were trade union members. To obtain a representative sample of trade union women, the Trade Union Women's Forum (TUWF[11]) was targeted as it had a substantial number of women members actively engaged in trade union activities in Sri Lanka[12]. Members of the TUWF were from 25 different trade unions representing all

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[10] Ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities - http://www.bmj.com/content/337/bmj.a1020

[11] The main objective of the TUWF is to strive to work towards improving the situation of all women through ensuring that women's issues are an integrated part of mainstream union activities.

[12] Considering time and monetary constraints to carry out a complete enumeration of all unions in Sri Lanka, the sample had to be restricted to 25 women from 25 different trade unions belonging to the Trade Union Women's Forum (TUWF) and twelve leaders leading twelve trade unions in Sri Lanka. This is a limitation of the study. It was not possible to collect exact and accurate statistical data on trade unions apart from approximate figures as none of the trade unions had exact statistical data. Calculations of the membership, therefore, are estimates based on trade union sources.

ethnic groups and religions in Sri Lanka, and they represented different employment sectors such as the industrial, plantation, public and private sectors. Members also come from different (all nine) provinces of the country. The TUWF is a diverse, inclusive forum of trade union women, with different political ideologies, belonging to different political parties but working together towards one common goal; viz. protecting and promoting the rights of Sri Lankan women. In addition to these 25 women, twelve trade union leaders representing the private, public sectors, covering different geographical areas and ethnic groups were also interviewed in-depth. The researcher used two sets of questionnaires as interview guides; one for female trade unionist and one for trade union leaders.

Theoretical Contributions on Women's Participation in Trade Union Leadership: Gender and Gender Equality

The researcher came across many definitions of gender during her literature review. 'Gender' refers to the socially constructed roles of and relations between men and women, while the term 'sex' refers to biological characteristics which define humans as female or male[13]. The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women[14] has defined gender as 'to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men'. This definition further states that these 'attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes'.

It also points out that 'attributes, opportunities and relationships are time specific and changeable. Further analysing the concept of gender, the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, explains that gender 'determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context[15]'. It further states that there are differences and inequalities between women and men in most of the societies in 'assigning responsibilities, in activities undertaken, access to and control over resources and in decision-making opportunities'.

According to the definition of the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, gender equality refers to the "equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls' and boys'". Accordingly, 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 on whether they are born male or female. It further states that gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. It also points out that gender equality is not a women's issue, but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Accordingly, it declares that "equality between women

13 http://www.eldis.org/index.cfm?objectId=76FB2B59-BFA2-926C-DC2B394188B4DA92
14 Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women- Gender mainstreaming: Strategy for promoting Gender Equality (2001).
15 www.mineaction.org/downloads/1/MA%20Guidelines%20WEB.pdf

and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people centred development"[16].

The Social Construction Theory

The social construction theory is identified by this researcher as the most useful framework for analising barriers to women's trade union leadership. Social construction theory is concerned with the ways we think about and use categories to structure our experience and analysis of the world (Jackson & Penrose, 1994). Andrews (2012), in his journal article focusing on 'what is social constructionism' argues that social constructionism is related to the nature of knowledge and as it is something that is 'created' and therefore, it is unconcerned with 'ontological' issues. He further points out that social constructionism, which emerged about 30 years ago and which has been correlated with the post-modern era in qualitative research, originated as an effort to admit the nature of reality.

Social Construction of Gender

> *"The child in the stroller was wearing a dark blue T-shirt and dark print pants...the father put a Yankee baseball cap on the child's head. Ah, a boy, I thought. Then I noticed the gleam of tiny earring in the child's ears, and as they got off, I saw the little flowered sneakers and lace-trimmed socks. Not a boy after all. Gender done."*[17]

Gender is a structural aspect of society more than an inherent concept. Culture, on the basis of gender, divides the sexes into separate categories whose members are assumed to share particular abilities and personality traits. According to the social construction framework, there is no universally distinct character that is masculine or feminine. Behaviors of men and women are influenced by many factors such as culture, education, religion, exposure and preferences.

The Theory of Patriarchy

The new world encyclopedia, pointing out that the word originates from Greek, defines patriarchy as 'Patria' meaning father and 'arché' meaning rule, refers to a society in which male members predominate in positions of power[18]. The word 'patriarchal' describes a general structure in which men have power over women. A patriarchal society, thus 'consists of a male dominated power structure throughout organized society and in individual relationships'[19].

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[16] *Gender mainstreaming: Strategy for promoting Gender Equality* (2001), Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women rev. August 2001.

[17] Lorber, J.1994. Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender. In Paradoxes of Gender. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

[18] http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Patriarchy

[19] http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/a/patriarchal.htm

The London Feminist Network defines patriarchy as the term used to describe the society in which we live today, portrayed by 'current and historic unequal power relations between women and men whereby women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed'. It further states that this takes place across 'almost every sphere of life but is particularly noticeable in women's under-representation in key state institutions, in decision-making positions and in employment and industry'[20]. Ray (2005) in 'Understanding Patriarchy', pointing out that subordination of women to men is prevalent in large parts of the world, defines patriarchy as the 'rule of the father in a male-dominated family'. She further states that it is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women.

Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". She points out that the use of the term 'social structure' is important here, as it 'clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one'. While accentuating that patriarchy need to be conceptualised at different levels of abstraction, Walby (1990) states that at the most abstract level it exists as a system of social relations. At a less abstract level, she identifies six locations of patriarchal relations. They are the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, patriarchal relations in sexuality, male violence and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. She states that these six structures have 'casual effects upon each other, both reinforcing and blocking, but are relatively autonomous'. Elaborating on patriarchal production relations in the household, Walby (1990) says that women's household labour is expropriated by their husbands or cohabitees by these. Accordingly, housewives are the producing class, while husbands are the expropriating class.

Walby (1990) further states that patriarchal relations within paid work exclude women from the better forms of work and segregate them into the worst jobs which are deemed to be less skilled. Andibo (2012) points out that patriarchy is a lens that keeps certain things out of focus. She highlights that patriarchy is "etiquette disguised as ethics, a system of more or less arbitrary values masquerading as the natural and right order of things. It defines men as the standard for humanity and women as something slightly less than that, and therefore robs us all of our full humanity". According to Andibo (2012), "patriarchy is what makes women believe that they are supposed to serve the needs of men, and encourages men to accept this as their due".

Leadership Theories

In regard to defining the concept 'leadership', this researcher found ample supporting indications and definitions. In simple words, a leader is 'a person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of a goal'. The available literature provides many different leadership theories that have

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[20] http://londonfeministnetwork.org.uk/home/patriarchy

emerged during the past and still emerging. Most of those can be classified as one of eight major types[21] listed below.

Amongst these, in the 'Great Man' Theory, the assumption is that the 'great leaders are born not made' and that the capacity for leadership is inherent. The 'Great Man' theory was based on the idea that 'whenever there is a need of leadership, a 'Great Man' would arise and solve the problems'. When the 'Great Man' theory was proposed, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership. Therefore, gender issues were not negotiable. Researchers and writers were male and historians were also males, which was the reason for the name of the theory being titled the 'Great Man Theory'.

The Trait Theory reflects the 'Great Man Theory'. The Trait Theory also assumes that people inherit certain qualities, particular personality or behavioral characteristics and traits that make them better leaders. This theory was based on the study of the characteristics of successful leaders. The researchers also made an assumption that if people found these leadership traits, they would also become leaders.

Gardner (1990) defines nine main tasks of leadership. They are, envisioning goals, affirming values, motivating, managing, achieving a workable level of unity, explaining, serving as a symbol, representing the group externally and renewing. The Contingency Theory emphasises particular variables related to the atmosphere that may decide which specific style of leadership is best suited for the condition. Situational Theory proposes meanwhile that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational variables. The Behavioral Theory of leadership is also based on the 'Great Man' theory but believes that people can learn to become leaders through teaching and observation. Participative leaders inspire participation and contributions from followers and assist followers feel belonging and committed to the decision-making process. Transactional theories or management theories, based on rewards and punishments focus on the role of supervision and group performance. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task.

If the above theories are carefully analised, it is clear that only men have been taken into consideration when developing their content. However, this researcher denies that men have innately better 'leadership qualities' than women. Good leadership has been defined by the women's movement as having, in addition to its relational and transformational qualities, a quality of empowerment. What is meant by 'empowerment' here is both personal feelings of effectiveness and actual amplified "powers" or abilities to achieve desired goals, individually and collectively.

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[21] Leadership Theories - 8 Major Leadership Theories -By Kendra Cherry, About.com Guide - http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/p/leadtheories.htm

Trade Union Leadership

The literature available on leadership focuses on traits and competencies taking an individualistic approach. However, this outlining of leadership is insufficient to look at and observe leadership in a movement such as trade unionism that has collective values. The concept of union leadership should be ideally conceptualised in a way in which the individual trade unionists practice trade union leadership in a collectivist's democratic background[22].

A study conducted in the UK[23] suggests that the leadership in trade unions exist at various levels. For example, leadership positions exist at a variety of levels, including not simply the most senior (regional, national and paid officers), but also the local (workplace representatives, women's representatives, equality representatives, etcetera). The leadership role in a trade union has a variety of demands placed on it. Available literature argues that it requires a certain amount of technical knowledge of the nature of business of the particular organisation, but also a compassionate understanding of the employees, their approach and their problems. Trade union leadership includes elected leaders who have a clear leadership role and are liable to a particular base, staff leaders who exercise leadership through their structural positions, and worksite leaders (elected, appointed ,volunteers) who take responsibility for representing and furthering the goals of the union with their co-workers. In a report produced by the Radcliffe College and Harvard University on 'Union Leadership Development in the 1990s and Beyond', Eaton (1992) points out that union leadership is fundamentally moral leadership.

What is a Trade Union?

A trade union (British English) or labour union (American English) is a group of workers/an organisation that have lined together to achieve common goals. The Trade Union Congress in London[24] defines trade unions as "organisations that represent people at work". Accordingly, the purpose of trade unions is to protect and improve workers' pay and conditions of employment. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines a trade union organisation as 'an organisation of employees usually associated beyond the confines of one enterprise, established for protecting or improving through collective action, the economic and social status of its members'.

Trade unions campaign for laws and policies which will benefit working people. An individual worker has very little power to influence decisions that are made about his or her job and by amalgamating together with other workers; there is more chance of having a voice and influence"[25]. Trade unions negotiate contracts and conditions with employers, keeping employee satisfaction high and protecting workers from unsafe or unfair working conditions. Through its leadership, on behalf of union members, trade unions collectively bargain with respective employers and negotiate labour contracts, terms and

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[22] Interview with the President of the Trade Union Women's Forum
[23] Kirton, G.; Healy, G. 2008. Women and Trade Union Leadership, Key Theoretical Concepts from UK-based literature. Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity, Queen Mary, University of London.
[24] http://www.tuc.org.uk/
[25] Trades Union Congress (TUC) in London - http://www.bized.co.uk/compfact/tuc/tuc11.htm

other relevant policies and conditions. The collective agreements negotiated and signed by the union leaders and employers are binding on the rank and file members, the employer and in sometimes even on other workers who are non union members.

History of Trade Unions

The first example available of workers organizing according to their own rules rather than those of their employers is the 'guild system' that began growing in Europe around the 10th century that sought to protect certain professions by controlling of skill mastery and advancement. Merchants banned together for protection and in time established formal rules and conventions for conduct and membership. By the 13th century, guilds were amongst the most powerful groups in Europe[26]. Therefore guilds are recognized as the antecedents of unions, even though this is sometimes disputed.

Labour unions or trade unions have been in existence since the late 1700's, and exploded in the United States during the nineteenth century. The first national union was the National Labour Union which was established in 1866 and the founding of this union was an important precedent[27]. Labour unions became more necessary with the Industrial Revolution[28] because more people were depending on the capitalist system[29] to survive. After almost three centuries since the first union was established, unions still mainly serve the same purposes for which they were originally founded. Agendas of unions today include protecting and promoting labour rights, core labour standards; eradicating child labour, raising the standard of living for the working class, providing more benefits to both workers and their families and promoting gender equity and equality at workplaces.

Trade Unionism in Sri Lanka

History of the labour Si Lankan labour movement goes back to the strikes by printers in Colombo in 1893, the carters strike in 1906, and the strikes in 1915 by railway workers. Following this, there had been a series of strikes and labour unrest during the period 1915-1920. In 1922 the 'Ceylon Labour Union'; the first major labour union in Sri Lanka was formed by the 'Father of the Labour Movement in Sri Lanka'; Mr. A.E. Gunasinha. Gunasinha was involved in forming the 'All Ceylon Labour Union Congress' in 1928 and the 'Ceylon Trade Union Congress' in 1935, which was formed by the merger of several trade

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[26] "The Rise and fall of the English Guild System" - Internet Shakespeare Editions, Department of English, University of Victoria - Canada - http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/society/city%20life/guilds2.html

[27] Divine, Joseph, 'The History of Labor Unions'. (2008).

[28] "The phrase 'Industrial Revolution ' is applied to a period from roughly 1750 to 1900, and refers to the massive social and economic upheavals attendant upon the shift from a primarily agricultural economy to a manufacturing one" Read more: http://www.wisegeek.com/what-was-the-industrial-revolution.htm

[29] Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production are owned and operated for a private profit; decisions regarding supply, demand, price, distribution, and investments are made by private actors in the free market; profit is distributed to owners who invest in businesses, and wages are paid to workers employed by businesses and companies - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism

unions[30]. During the period of the British rule, the British employers treated the Ceylonese working class inhumanly; workers were suppressed, disappointed, displeased and highly frustrated. The working class was marginalized from enjoying the economic benefits. Workers were agitated and the distress led to the formation of unions in Ceylon which also initiated the struggle to gain independence from the British colonial rule[31]. Jayawardena (1972) states that the first trade union leaders in Sri Lanka were the radicals who defied the accepted opinions of society and backed many of the causes that were unpopular with persons of a conventional background. She further points out that this section of the middle class, who were ready to challenge authority, gave a new approach to problems of poverty and advocated trade unionism as a method of obtaining improved economic conditions for the workers. The first person to introduce ideas of trade unionism into Ceylon was Alfred Ernst Buultjens (1865-1916), who was influenced by both western liberal education and the Buddhist revival (Jayawardena, 1972).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are 2,074 registered trade unions in Sri Lanka, of which 54.5 % are in the public sector, 27.5 % in public corporations and 18 % in the private sector. The ILO further states that the number of members covered by the trade unions amount to 9.5 per cent of the total workforce of Sri Lanka. Most of these unions have 50 or fewer members but there are a few large unions each representing over 10,000 workers. Most large unions in Sri Lanka are affiliated with political parties and play a leading role in the political process. For example, the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS), one of Sri Lanka's biggest unions is affiliated with the main opposition party; the United National Party (UNP) while the Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya (SLNSS), another large and strong union is affiliated with the ruling party; the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Party leaders in Sri Lanka often use their members to crush trade union action initiated by rival unions. Trade unions in Sri Lanka played a major role and were at the frontline of the movement for independence prior to 1947[32]. At that time the unions performed an important political role and this tradition of political involvement has continued to this day. Sri Lanka was given the franchise in 1931 by the British and this too on the other hand perceptibly advanced the position of workers as a group with 'political power'. However, some major unions in the public sector are politically independent and there are some independent federations and confederations. There are independent unions in the private sector as well. Some trade unions in Sri Lanka have also managed to establish affiliations with Global Union Federations[33] (GUFs).

It is estimated that approximately 20% of the 8.1 million workforce is unionized and more than 70 percent of the plantation workforce is unionized[34]. It is estimated that there are approximately one million union members and it is also estimated that approximately 11 percent of the nonagricultural workforce in the private sector is unionized[35]. Most workers in large private firms belong to a union but workers in small businesses and small-scale agriculture usually do not belong to any union. Employees in the public sector

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[30] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._Ekanayake_Gunasinha
[31] *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 19, July 1937.
[32] http://www.ceylontoday.lk/22-8965-news-detail-over-regulation-main-cause-for-employer-employee-disputes.html, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_independence_movement
[33] A global Union Federation (GUF) is an international federation of national and regional trade unions organizing in specific industry sectors or occupational groups, previously known as International Trade Secretariats (ITSs)
[34] Discussion with Comrade Bala Thampo, General Secretary, Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU), February 07, 2013
[35] Interview with Comrade Anton Marcus, General Secretary, FTZ&GSEU, December, 2012

are unionized at a very high rate.[36] Labour laws in Sri Lanka divide unions as public and non public sector unions and these two groups are not permitted to federate with each other.

Women in Trade Union Leadership-Current Sri Lankan Scenario

According to Jayaweera, Sanmugam & Abeywardane (1998), women are underrepresented at decision making level and the women's wings that have been formed in some trade unions appear to have a marginal role. This was highlighted in research carried out by the above for the Center for Women's Research (CENWOR) in 1998 on Women and Trade Unions. The barriers to women's active participation in trade union activities highlighted in the CENWOR (1998) research report were time constrains, gendered social norms, lack of awareness and confidence and the favourable opportunities male union members have to be elected.

Sixteen trade unions were surveyed by CENWOR and this study revealed that all the leadership positions of these 16 unions were vested with non-workers, males who had been in union activities for a long period of time and who were also affiliated to political parties. A study carried out by the Marga Institute in collaboration with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) in 1999 raises the issue whether having full time leaders in trade unions for many years obstruct the entry of women and young leaders into trade unions. The Marga study also takes into account whether depending on established leadership restrict the participation of women more than men in trade union leadership and decision making.

Ranaraja (2003), in her paper on 'Barriers to Women's Participation in Trade Unions[37]' points out several obstacles to women's participation in trade unions such as cultural restrictions, male domination and suspicion. She states that husbands of many female trade union members do not allow their wives to participate in training programmes where male participants were present. Ranaraja (2003), quoting a trade union leader, writes that 'husbands of female members are reluctant to permit their spouses to interact with other males in the more open and unconventional manner required by most trade union activities'. Ranaraja (2003) also points out in her study that male trade union leaders themselves have noted that they prefer to have trade union meetings in the late evenings in a 'club atmosphere'.

Ranaraja (2003) further talks about socio-economic constraints women union members have to face. She argues that many of these barriers are 'derived from the attitudes and personality of males, within the families, within the trade unions and in the society at large'. Employer and public hostility towards trade unions and low gender empowerment were also listed down as factors that lead to barriers.

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[36] US Department of State - Bureau Of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labor - 2009 - Country Report on Human Rights Practices - http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136093.htm
[37] ILO, Colombo, 2003.

Women in Trade Union Leadership-Current International Scenario

Do women all over the world have common/specific barriers that prevent them from attaining leadership positions? To answer the above question, this researcher reviewed and researched literature available internationally on women and decision making positions and leadership in trade unions and on barriers that prevent women attaining trade union leadership positions.

Accordingly, the following information was found to be pivotal. A study conducted by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) '8th March Survey; from membership to leadership: How to advance women in decision-making positions in trade unions' (2010) show that an increasing number of female workers are joining the ranks of trade unions throughout Europe. According to ETUC's 2010, 8th March Survey, women account for around 45% of the trade union membership of ETUC, which is an increase of three per cent since 2006. The study report points out that 'women are important for trade unions' future growth and sustainability and that trade unionism is key in the promotion of gender equality in employment and society at large'. One of the most important findings in this study was that only 07% of the top trade union positions were taken up by women.

Although women constitute about one third of the members of labour unions in the United States, they are still barely visible in top leadership (Gray, 1993)[38]. The proportion of women in top elected leadership posts has been less than five percent in the 1950s and 1960s, in the 1970s the numbers increased, reaching 11 percent in 1978 and this proportion remained the same in 1993 in the United States (Gray 1993). Gray (1993) identifies some roadblocks he sees in the US context. The major roadblocks he identifies in his study are societal, work- and union-related, and personal based on gender discrimination, lack of self-confidence and gender stereotyping. Kirton & Healy (2008) point out in their study on 'Women and Trade Union Leadership, Key Theoretical Concepts from UK-based literature'[39] that the available data demonstrate that women are under-represented among trade union leaders in the UK, referring to the Labour Research, 2008.They revealed that the literature has identified five main barriers to women's participation and leadership in unions and that 'individual women obviously experience these barriers in different combinations to different degrees across time and space depending on a range of work, family and personal circumstances'. The gendered division of domestic work, the organisation of women's work, the organisation of trade union activity, trade union leadership styles and the trade union agenda are the five main barriers to women's participation and leadership in unions, Kirton & Healy(2012).

A cross-national study carried out by Kirton & Healy (2012) of the School of Business and Management at Queen Mary, University of London in the US and the UK found that in both the UK and the US, women still have fewer top positions in trade unions despite escalation in overall female membership. The study report, *Lift as You Rise: Union Women's Leadership Talk*, discusses the lack of women at union leadership level, and the management styles adopted by those women who do climb to the top. The report reinforces that the leadership structures in both America and Britain trade unions are historically

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[38] The Route to the Top: Female Union Leaders and Union Policy, Cornell University ILR School DigitalCommons@ILR

[39] Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity, Queen Mary, University of London

dominated by white men. It highlights that while more women have joined unions in the last decades, the proportion of female leaders in either country remains low[40].

Unions in Canada have successfully fought to reduce the work day and week for members, however these same unions demand long hours of work from their leaders. These workload expectations assume that union leaders, elected, hired, and volunteer, are men who are always available and have 'no competing responsibilities or interests' (Saskatchewan, 2005[41]). Thus, women are underrepresented in Canadian union leadership.

A qualitative study done on the 'Gender Gap in Union Leadership in Australia' by Rae Cooper[42] (2012) points out that even though women make up close to fifty percent of all trade unionists in Australia, senior leadership positions and the culture of unions evade a tallying feminization. The study report further reveals that *"despite high levels of commitment to union work and enjoyment of many aspects of the job, women working within the union movement keenly feel that they are under-represented in senior roles and they view sexism and a 'masculinist' culture as alive and well within unions"*. The report indicates that this gender imbalance in union leadership has a strong impact on union concerns, such as union collective bargaining agendas.

Andibo (2012) identified obstacles women face in participating effectively in trade union membership and leadership in Kenya, and made recommendations aimed at enhancing women's participation and leadership of trade unions[43]. The study revealed that: women are viewed as equally efficient and even more committed compared to their male counterparts. Andibo (2012) points out that Kenya, like many African societies, is a patriarchal society. This study shows that the 'male-dominated culture' of the unions or 'hostile reactions from male members' discourage women from joining unions. Another finding was that the women do not have time to join unions or participate in union activities because of 'conflicting family responsibilities'. The study also revealed that women lack confidence to join unions or to target leadership positions. One of the main reasons as to why women do not obtain trade union membership, highlighted in the study was that 'women do not understand or appreciate how they can benefit from trade unions'.

A preliminary research report on Gender and Trade Unions[44] by the Global Labour University alumni focusing on 11 countries; Viz. Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ghana, South Korea, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Turkey, UK and Zimbabwe carried out in 2009 and published in 2010, released findings reinforced by others from research on experiences of women trade unionists and the barriers they have to

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[40] http://www.qmul.ac.uk/media/news/items/hss/83833.html
[41] Union Workload: A Barrier to Women Surviving Labour-Movement Leadership, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, based on an article of Adriane Paavo, a Saskatchewan-based labour educator, 2005.
[42] Work and Organisational Studies, University of Sydney School of Business, Institute Building, Ho3, University of Sydney, MSW 2006, Australia.
[43] Obstacles Women Face in Participating Effectively in Trade Union Membership and Leadership, Scholarlink Research Institute Journals, 2012.
[44] Coordinated by Patricia Chong and Sue Ledwith, Report compiled by Sue Ledwith, Ruskin College, Oxford, UK, Sept 2010.

enter leadership positions, worldwide. They are 'patriarchy', undermined women's confidence, especially when there are no support systems and women's domestic responsibilities.

A research which was conducted in eight African countries, including Ghana by the African Labour Research Network (ALRN) on 'the status of women in trade unions in Africa in 2011 reveals that the reason why women do not fight for positions in trade unions is because 'most people, particularly men have negative perceptions about women and doubt their leadership capabilities which dampen women's enthusiasm. The study also reveals that the few women, who succeed are intimidated, discouraged and discriminated against[45].

Their Voice: Obstacles Women Face in Attaining Trade Union Leadership Positions in Sri Lanka

Gender Role Stereotypes and Other Socio-Cultural Constraints

All women unionists attached to the TUWF who were interviewed, believed strongly that gender stereotyping and socio-cultural expectations on women create external and internal barriers to the advancement of women in union leadership, leaving women with limited and contradictory options. They pointed out that the prevailing pattern of gender segregation means that women often do not develop the skills and competences in the workplace that they might take forward with confidence into trade union leadership roles.

> *"Conventional norms and prototype of conduct in a patriarchal society and stereotypical views of the roles and responsibilities of men and women pretense a strong barrier to women's participation and advancement in trade union leadership"* (Focus Group Discussion - FGD, member of the TUWF, 52).

The discussions held with union women and leaders disclosed that 'trade unionism is traditionally viewed as men's activity'. To the question *'is trade unionism a men's activity or a women's activity or is it for men and women regardless of gender?'* raised by the researcher, twelve TUWF members said it is a 'men's activity' while 13 said that it is for men and women regardless of gender. Eight out of the twelve leaders interviewed also said trade unionism is more suitable for men. The study found out that women are most welcome as members in Sri Lankan trade unions but women who manage to reach decision-making levels face negative attitudes ranging from denial, reluctance to open antagonism. It was clear that the denial was not only from male members but also sometimes from the female members.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that some female members believe that leadership is a man's job and that females are not as competent as men to hold such positions. Traditional gender roles may allow a position for women in unions, but it is a position that is as close as possible to her traditional role, which is, serving men rather than sitting alongside them. When women venture out of these

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[45] http://www.modernghana.com/news/324453/1/less-women-in-trade-unions-8211-study-reveals.html Published: Tuesday, April 12, 2011.

delimiting functions they are seen as 'difficult'. Gender stereotypes both underpin and create gender inequality.

The social construction of the roles and expectations of men and women, from the day they were born, as baby boys and baby girls, young boys and young girls, results in different behaviors and choices that impact on their choices and achievements. Social construction of gender in a patriarchal society limits women's capacities and competencies. This impacts women's participation in social decision making roles (Ray, 2005). The attitudes towards a leader were also seen as socially constructed. Majority of the surveyed women and men believed that women were better at 'taking care' while men were the most suitable to 'take charge'.

This study found a pattern of stereotypic judgments in participants' evaluations of women leaders. The findings reinstate the available empirical literature on gender stereotypes. As a result of these negative perceptions, women's strengths and credentials are overlooked and this holds back women moving towards leadership positions. Stereotypical behavior labeled as masculine and feminine, curtails women's advancement. As highlighted in chapter two under the literature review, generally leadership is seen through stereotypically masculine behaviors and traits. A 19th century idea, the 'Great Man Theory' is still pervasive in today's society.

Many respondents in this study believed that leadership skills come easily, effortlessly and naturally to men as men possess 'inborn leadership qualities'. This was reflected in statements as follows;

> *"Whatever said and done, leadership comes naturally to men"* (FGD, female unionist, 56).

> *"Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ and all other religious leaders were men. This indicates that leading is a man's job"* (FGD, female unionist, 52)

AS a matter of interest, it must be said that these assertions led to a broader discussion on the role and the capacities of prominent women leaders such as of Mother Theresa, Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi etcetera. When this researcher conducted FGDs with selected members of the TUWF and asked the participants to give 'one main reason that they think men are more suitable for trade union leadership positions, approximately 45% of the respondents (nine out of 20) said that women are 'too soft and fragile'. According to this researcher's analysis, stereotyping of women's roles is seen all over the world. The existing literature reviewed accentuates that even though the cultures of countries worldwide may be different, perceptions in regard to the role of women may be similar.

Imbalanced Division of Family Responsibilities

Another barrier pointed out by all interviewees (TUWU members and trade union leaders) and FGD participants (TUWF members) was the lopsided division of family responsibilities. This was identified as a main reason limiting women's participation in trade union leadership positions.

"Women in Sri Lanka continue to shoulder the greater share of child care and domestic responsibilities" (General Secretary, FTZ&GSEU).

All the male and female interviewees had the above view with regard to family responsibilities. A woman's productive years which are also her reproductive years in life are taken up with bearing and rearing babies and children and looking after the family, sometimes taking care of the elderly and the sick in the immediate and or extended family. This places heavy demands on women's time, leaving little time for personal development and other social activities. A woman's family responsibilities constrain them from attending meetings, volunteering for committees, staying out late after work, and travelling, all of which are essential for union orientation, training, and advancement to attain leadership positions. Women's 'time poverty' impacts negatively in her enhancements. All the study respondents stressed on the fact that a woman active in a trade union usually has a triple burden: family responsibilities, employment (job) responsibilities and the union responsibilities. Hence, all the women surveyed believed that if women had to take up a leadership position in a trade union, it will add to their 'burdens'.

The study revealed that the women who manage to negotiate gender roles and relations in their individual households climb up the carrier ladder. The others are compelled to keep away from 'other' activities such as participating in union activities and especially taking up responsible leadership positions. Thestudy, through observations, also revealed that the few women who were at leadership positions in trade unions had lower levels of responsibility as leaders but these women were happy about it as it allowed them to balance their work, social and family lives. However, this study discovered that 90% of the women holding leadership positions in unions were over 35 years of age, either unmarried, didn't have children, or had grown up children with less and manageable family responsibilities.

Trade Union Culture

Another inter related fact that curtails women's participation in trade union leadership found in this study was the male-dominated nature of the "trade union culture." All the women interviewed unanimously said that men dominate existing trade union structures. The discussions with female members as well as union leaders admitted that 'gender-blind policies' are impediments for women to take part in leadership positions.

"Trade union rules, codes of conducts, union cultures, meetings etcetera are mostly set up by men in unions, with the presumption that men will be the main actors and will work with other men" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 49).

Trade union activities are typically organized to suit male employment patterns and arguably male 'lifestyle' patterns. Decision making meetings are very important in any organisation. The style, time, places that the union meetings take place hinder women's participation in these important meetings and as a result create obstacles in taking up leadership positions. All the female interviewees from unions

admitted that their male counterparts have their own social networks, which excludes women. Inappropriate timing and places of meetings also impacts on women's possibilities for participation.

The researcher has worked very closely with trade unions in Sri Lanka for over twelve years and has spent a lot of time at union offices. She has been observing the 'culture and patterns' of unions that suit men. When the researcher asked 'when and where do your unions have important meetings?' at a FGD, four female respondents belonging to four unions in this study sample said that some of the important meetings were being held at restaurants and bars or clubs after working hours. Ten out of ten respondents (FGD) said that these meetings, *'normally go on till late night'*. Majority of the FGD members at this discussion agreed that male union members often use 'alcohol' at meetings to 'build solidarity and show conformity to their group'. They pointed out that 'even though the culture of unions accepts 'drinking', female union members find it very uncomfortable around drunken men'.

English Language Skills and Access to Information Technology

Only ten per cent of the women unionists interviewed were proficient in English. The majority of the women unionist in the study sample were unable to express well in English. However, 90% of these women could read, write and understand basic English. Computer literacy of these women was also very low. The women unionists over the age of 50 were not computer literate. The majority of the younger women knew how to type, send a mail and use the internet. The study revealed that only a handful of women unionists use internet and social media. In today's world, a leader has to have access to and skills on computer and information technology (IT). Knowledge of English is essential especially when it comes to dealing with and campaigning, working with international organisations, international unions and Global Union Federations.

Union leaders who were interviewed pointed out that English is being widely used at negotiations between employers and unions. They also said that unfortunately, only English speaking union members could be nominated and selected for foreign trainings, international workshops and seminars. Only the members who have English language skills will get the opportunity to take part in international high level training events. Therefore, female unionists admitted that women are automatically being sidelined because they lack these skills.

The in-depth interviews with female members and trade union leaders exposed that the level of English proficiency and IT skills are higher in male members. Ninety per cent of the trade union leaders interviewed had high standards of English, both written and spoken. All the union leaders said that male members are more competent in using modern technology. It was stated during the discussions that often elderly, English speaking male members are chosen to take part in overseas trainings. All the male union leaders interviewed were computer proficient. The discussions reinstate the fact that boys compared to girls are being given more opportunities to learn English and enhance computer skills while they are young. This is a result of 'gender stereotyping and the social construction of gender' (Kandasamy 2002).

Female participants of this study pointed out that when they left school, they were encouraged to go for cookery, sewing and beauty culture classes and were not encouraged to take English or computer courses.

Lack of Leadership Training

Sixty five percent of the TUWF members interviewed highlighted the lack of specific leadership and mentorship programs for women trade unionists as 'something that prevents women from being seen as effective leaders'. As majority of the FGD participants pointed out that women lack leadership qualities, the researcher in her in-depth face to face interviews with members of the TUWF asked what the main reason was for this issue. Majority believed that women in unions do not have 'proper and genuine' opportunities to enhance their leadership qualities.

> *Women lack leadership skills and qualities only because they have not got good opportunities to boost their abilities'* (FGD, member of the TUWF, 37).

Decision-making skill is something that could be 'sharpened' by practicing (FGD, member of the TUWF, 42).

Non-familiarity with Union Structures

The majority of the TUWF members interviewed did not seem to know or understand how union structures work. Only seven interviewees (out of 25 TUWF members interviewed) knew the hierarchical structure of their respective unions. The majority were unaware of union policies and of how to get elected to decision-making positions. Only five out of 25 interviewees (TUWF) had gone through their union constitutions. Three of the TUWF interviewees did not know whether their respective unions had a constitution or not.

The above was evident when the researcher asked questions about existing gender policies, their constitution and union structures from TUWF members at face to face interviews. Half of the male union leaders interviewed (six out of 12) pointed out that this is a major drawback for women's participation in decision making. Backing up the opinion of these male union leaders, the few female leaders interviewed said that knowing the structures and policies of their respective unions contributed in attaining leadership positions in their unions.

Lack of Confidence

The in-depth interviews with TUWF members revealed that the majority of women unionists tend to think that they are not as competent as their male counterparts in certain union activities. Women underestimate their abilities and deem that their male counterparts are better suited to union decision making positions. It was revealed that some women believed that they are not worthy enough to take up leadership positions. When the researcher, during in-depth face to face interviews, asked the interviewees whether

they believe they are suitable for a leadership position in your trade union, all the interviewees at once said 'yes' but when the researcher asked for their honest response, at least sixty percent of the them stated that they felt 'imperfect' or less skilled for holding leadership positions.

The interviews revealed that the main reason for this 'inferiority complex' is led by internalized gender stereotypes. *"Women lack the 'buoyancy and poise' to see themselves as leaders"* (FGD, member of the TUWF, *46).* At least half of the women interviewed seemed to form internalized oppressions around them. In-depth interviews showed that many women did not have the confidence and brazenness to get on to leadership positions. The separation between the public and private spheres, which are distinguished as men's and women's worlds make women lack confidence to take on positions that would lead them to contend with their male counterparts.

The social construction of gender plays a role here too. The majority of the union leaders interviewed said that in some cases women do not have self-confidence to take up a trade union position, even if a 'place' has been provided for a woman. When asked what the reason for this was, 20% of the women unionists said that it is sometimes because of the hostility from male colleagues. Half of the respondents felt that women in leadership positions face severe challenges as opposed to their male counterparts. The majority of the male union leaders interviewed identified women as not being ambitious.

Political Unionism

Political unionism strategies dominates the labour movement in Sri Lanka, as in most South Asian countries (Biyanwila, 2005). Most of the trade unions in Sri Lanka are affiliated to a political party and party politics play a major role on the agendas of trade unions. Politics is seen as a masculine thing characterized by aggression and unfair play that masquerade danger. Women's fear for their safety creates barriers for them in taking part in trade union leadership positions. They would therefore, prefer to play an inactive, silent role in unions they belong to.

> *"We have three trade unions in our workplace. All three are affiliated to major political parties in Sri Lanka. I am interested in protecting my 'rights' but not interested in politics. My union has its political party agenda and plays a major role during elections. I don't want to be seen or branded as someone promoting party politics. So I prefer to play a passive role"* (member of the TUWF, 29).

Women's social susceptibility in conflicts and other crises was highlighted by participants in the FGDs as a major hurdle to women assuming leadership positions in unions. The majority of the interviewees pointed out that in conflict environments (eg.; political, ethnic), women choose not to take on such positions because of safety concerns.

Discrimination and Gender Based Violence

Discrimination and gender based violence were also found as factors preventing women from getting into leadership positions conventionally held by men. When the researcher asked the interviewees (TUWF) if they believed that discrimination and gender based violence was a barrier to leadership, 75% stressed that they believed that discrimination and gender based violence was a major barrier to leadership positions in unions. Regardless of age, the majority of the female participants surveyed said that they had experienced clear discrimination at least once within their union.

Eighty five per cent of the respondents said that they have heard of harassment faced by other female colleagues in unions. When asked from the union leaders (interviewees) if they think that female members in their respective trade unions were been harassed sexually or discriminated by their male counterparts, 40 % of the leaders interviewed accepted the fact that women members are being discriminated by male counterparts. They also accepted that sexual harassment; mainly verbal harassment (could) exist in trade unions.

The other 60% of trade union leaders interviewed denied the fact. Half of the women surveyed said that to avoid sexual harassment, the best was to accept passive roles. However, the other half was against this statement.

"Sexual harassment is the harasser's problem and not ours" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 34).

Another participant in a FGD pointed out that all unions must have non-discrimination, anti-sexual harassment policies (member of the TUWF, 46). None of the unions interviewed had clear, written sexual harassment policies. However, majority of the union leaders interviewed said that they have 'a nondiscrimination clause' in their constitution or union policy. One trade union leader interviewed (attached to a GUF) said that they are in the process of formulating an anti-sexual harassment policy for their union.

Nepotism and Favouritism

"In some trade unions, the family ties of union leaders extend throughout the union's administration" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 39).

"Leadership goes from father to the son and then even to the grandson. This is seen in a few trade unions in Sri Lanka but this discourages women who are interested in and looking forward to taking up leadership positions in their respective trade unions" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 57).

The researcher found that nepotism and favoritism were visible (sometimes takes place in an invisible form) in the operations of some trade unions. 'Playing favorites' was also highlighted as a major issue.

About 60% of the women unionists interviewed said that some trade union leaders favor their friends and relatives. Favouritism is the unfair support shown to one person or group, especially by someone in authority[46]. Accordingly, favouritism in trade unions crops up when a union leader shows preferential treatment towards those members who they are socially connected with, to the disadvantage of other members. 'Favouritism is 'discernible in some unions in terms of selecting and endorsing for leadership positions and training' (FGD, member of the TUWF, 42). Discussions with the TUWF revealed that favouritism gives a notion to the other union members that a person is treated in a better way for no valid or convincing reason. Favoritism was identified by 60% of the trade union women interviewed as a barrier faced by women members in trade unions in Sri Lanka in attaining leadership positions.

Lack of Affirmative Action and Political Will

Lack of institutional quotas, policies and programs for attracting women leaders were considered systematic impediments in trade unions by all female unionists and male union leaders interviewed. The trade union leaders who participated in this study said that they conduct leadership programs for their members (male and female) mostly with the financial and technical support of local and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). The female members interviewed, however said that most of these trainings were one to two day programmes and were basic and inadequate. Majority of the female participants of this study indicated that unions do not attempt to attract potential women leaders. However, seven trade union leaders who participated in this study said that a number of proactive actions are being taken by them to promote women's interests in taking up leadership positions in their trade unions. The majority of the trade union leaders interviewed concurred that the current policies of their trade unions fall short and that there is much more to be done to promote women's leadership. Lack of political will on the part of trade union leadership was also identified by the TUWF as a barrier. Some male leaders did not see the under representation of women in leadership positions as an issue to be addressed as there were, according to them, 'more important, other urgent matters' to be addressed. Half of the unions interviewed had a system to have at least one female amongst their office bearers. However, according to the study, only one union (Ceylon Plantation Workers Union) had a unique policy, an inspiring rule at every level that the president and secretary positions must be shared between a male and a female.

Labeling

The question of 'labeling' was not raised by the researcher initially but this issue came up in the FGDs. As this issue was highlighted at the FGDs by participants, the researcher went in to asking further questions on this to get a clear understanding. The majority of the surveyed women said that women who worked hand in hand with male counterparts in unions were more likely to be labeled as *'fast women'*. When asked what this meant, the respondents said that *'sometimes, women are being coupled with men'*. Then the researcher asked whether this 'coupling' could not happen outside union activities, at the work

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[46] http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/favouritism

place etcetera. One response was as follows;

> "*Yes, but as union activities, particularly if you are a leader, involve a lot of 'working together with male counterparts', especially during strikes and other union actions. Therefore, there are more chances for such labeling*" (FGD).

50% of the women unionists interviewed said that they fear this labeling which could even lead to family disputes.

> "*I prefer to have a good family life rather than a 'good social life*" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 42).

The other half were not concerned about this but accepted the fact that such labeling could happen. Half of the women surveyed also believed that some trade union leaders tend to encourage young, attractive women to take up leadership positions. Some female interviewees said that there are rumors coupling these women with male trade union leaders. This too discourages women from considering leadership positions.

Attitudes of Husbands, Parents and Family Members

Traditional attitudes of husbands and fathers who see 'a woman's place in the home' add another hurdle. Majority of the women surveyed agreed to the fact that their husbands did not like to see them associating with males. This was identified by a majority of women interviewed as 'jealousy'. Women, if taken up leadership positions will have to associate with male counterparts. Women feared this would create unnecessary disputes with their husbands.

> "*My husband never allows me to go for residential training programs. When I inform him about any training or meeting organized by any organisation, the first question from him will be whether there will be any males participating!*" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 41)

> "*I have to be back from office before 6.30 pm. If I get late my husband fights with me*" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 53).

This 'time-curfew' appeared to be common in most homes in Sri Lanka (FGD).

> "*Wives, mothers and daughters have to cater to this 'curfew', in order to avoid unpleasant consequences*" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 57).

"Some parents are extremely protective of their daughters because they fear for their 'daughter's safety and because trade unionists are often under threat, parents do not want their daughters to be active in trade unionism" (member of the TUWF, 30).

"My father, who is a conservative person, wanted me to be a 'typical girl' who fits into the stereotype of a normative woman; submissive and non-questioning. Now I have a husband with similar conventional ideas. I am glad that at least I am allowed to work outside the home" (member of the TUWF, 27).

"Women in our families are not allowed to engage in any particular activity or field that does not seem appropriate for a woman to be in. I was encouraged to choose the nursing profession but am being constantly discouraged the engagement in union activities" (member of the TUWF, 31).

This verifies that male family members in many instances directly control the actions and decisions of girls and women and are reinforced to stick to normative gender role behaviours.

Journeying Through the Findings

From ancient times to modern years, the opinion of the majority of the society has been and is that men are born and destined to lead and that women are destined to follow, no matter how qualified, intelligent, skilled and suitable these women are. The study findings here reinstate the finding of many studies conducted worldwide on women's leadership in unions. One of the studies carried out by Catalyst, a non-profit organisation; 'The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don't' points out gender stereotyping as one of the key barriers to women's advancement in leadership leaving women with limited, conflicting, and often unfavorable options. Gender stereotyping was seen in this study too as the 'main trigger' causing and relating to all the barriers women face in entering leadership positions in trade unions in Sri Lanka.

The study reinforced that even though a substantial number of women were seen as trade union members in Sri Lanka, only a diminutive number of females were seen holding leadership positions in trade unions. Even in trade unions formed in workplaces with a majority of women workers and in predominantly female occupations, women were rarely seen at leadership levels. One of the leading nurses' unions with the majority of female members was headed by a Buddhist monk. The study accentuates that the average of women members in unions is approximately 35% (FGDs). No accurate statistics were available on the percentage of women members and women leaders in trade unions in Sri Lanka at the Labour Secretariat in Colombo, at union offices, at labour organisations working in Sri Lanka or at any other reliable organisation at the commencement or while carrying out the study. Information available was 'hearsay'. However, the study confirms the fact that the representation of women in union leadership is still disproportionately low.

In this study sample, amongst women interviewees, there were four women who held the position of a Vice-President in a trade union and one President. There was one joint Secretary and four Treasurers. As mentioned, the researcher could not locate a single female General Secretary apart from one Joint Secretary who had to share the position with a male unionist. According to the researcher's observations, all these women found in 'leadership positions' were only token representation of women situated in in quiescent posts.

Eighty per cent of the women members interviewed and half of the male unions interviewed believed that women 'may not have the tendency to misuse funds' and that the role of a Treasure in a union is a position that a woman could 'handle'. This was well defined with the answers received to the question 'why do unions tend to have women as Treasurers?' However, 10% of the women and 25% of the male leaders interviewed believed that being a union Treasurer is 'too much for a woman to handle'. Nevertheless, in-depth, comprehensive interviews with the groups implied that 'Treasurers' are seen as a group that could be easily marginalized when important decisions are taken.

According to a participant in one of the FGDs, there were three female Vice-Presidents and one female Deputy President in her trade union federation. This union federation[47] also had one female Deputy General Secretary and two female Committee members. This federation therefore had six females in leadership positions out of 22 leaders in total. There were two female Vice-Presidents in two other trade unions that were interviewed. A female Deputy Secretary was found in another union interviewed. Amongst the unions in this study sample, one union and one union federation[48] had women as their Presidents. However, the General Secretary of this union federation had all decision making powers and the 'President' was only symbolic, a 'token' who rarely got involved in any union activities. In fact, she didnot know what was really going on in her union that claims approximately 15,000 members.

The other union in the study sample that had a female president is the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union (CPWU). A daughter of a plantation worker in the central tea plantation estates, with her inborn leadership qualities, had managed to transform the culture of this union; the CPWU, by rising to its presidency through the formerly male-dominated ranks. She has achieved this milestone through a long process, through setting up a women's section[49], which was successful in joining many young women to the union and showed that women can be successful union leaders. She also has persuaded the union to allow 50% female membership of plantation committees. She also had motivated a rule that 'the President and Secretary positions must be shared between a male and a female'. Once the 'Red Flag Women's Movement' she established was working and moving ahead successfully, membership of the CPWU started to grow. She was elected as the CPWU president in 2006.

A Public Service Union Federation had only one female Office Bearer out of a total of 22 Office Bearers. A staff union in the estate sector had 23 Executive Committee members; all men.

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[47] National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)
[48] All Ceylon Federation of Free Trade Unions (ACFFTU)-90% of members were females
[49] Red Flag Women's Movement

These findings reflect stereotypes of women seen in other sectors in Sri Lanka. Attributes of women are seen as 'soft, beautiful, non-aggressive and mild etcetera whereas men are seen as aggressive and strong. There are certain behaviors expected from men and women in the society. These characteristics as well as the connected behavior are socially constructed.

> *"Socialization proceeds with a set of rewards and punishments, ranging from changes in tone of voice to physical chastisement. Thus little girls are more likely to be told to be quite and not to make a noise in circumstances where little boys would be expected to be boisterous"* (Walby, 1990).

Walby (1990) further points out that the toys and games of childhood are also gendered. She further states that little girls are likely to be given dolls to play while boys get train sets and lego.

> *"Little girls are expected to play at ironing daddy's hanky, while little boys play soldiers"* (Walby, 1990).

She argues that dolls are a preparation for childcare and soldiers for warfare.

Lober (1994) states that parenting is gendered, with different expectations for mothers and for fathers, and people of different genders work at different kinds of jobs. She further states as follows;

> *"The work adults do as mothers and fathers and as low level workers and high level bosses, shapes women's and men's life experiences, and these experiences produce different feelings, consciousness, relationships, skills, ways of being that we call feminine or masculine".*

She points out that all these process constitute the social construction of gender. Walby (1990) says that the books and magazines that children and adolescents read are considered to differentiate gender identities further. She further states that in these books and magazines, girls will be portrayed helping their mother with domestic chores, while boys are engaged helping their father in 'manly' ones or engaging in adventures. Walby (1990) argues that these illustrate stereotyped images of the activities of both children and adults, contributing to expectations of both present and future gender roles. Advertising generally shows that women are either sexually glamorous or as wives and mothers while men occupy positions of power (Walby, 1990). The plots of teledrams and Sinhala, Tamil, especially Bollywood movies which are popular in Sri Lanka give negative gender images and further subordinate women. The education systems and curriculum contributes and continues the process of 'constructing gender'.

It is clear that only men have been taken into consideration when developing leadership theories. The philosophy behind these theories; that men have innately better leadership qualities is also invented by men. The women's movement points out that a good leader has to have, in addition to its relational and transformational qualities, a quality of empowerment. A man or a woman, who has both

personal feelings of effectiveness and actual amplified 'powers' or an ability to achieve desired goals individually and collectively, is suitable for leadership.

As previously stated in this report, Sri Lanka is a patriarchal society in which generally, men are seen to have power over women. Thus, a male dominated power structure exists in the society and in individual relationships. Women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed. The social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women (Ray, 2005) is the reason that binds all barriers that women face in attaining leadership positions in trade unions in Sri Lanka.

Men who have families, children, elderly parents still find time to take part in social activities where as women do not find any 'extra' time for such social engagements. The greater share of family and domestic responsibilities falls on women because of the ideological construct of the society. The same applies when taking into consideration the level of skills between men and women. In our society, young girls are being encouraged to attend cookery, beauty culture, flower arrangement classes whereas young boys are being encouraged to learn and enhance computer skills, technological skills, language skills etcetera.

This division begins at a very early stage of a girl's and boy's life. The ones who get opportunities to enhance their skills, the ones who get wider exposure while young, will apparently show leadership qualities with confidence as adults. These arguments tally with previous research findings on this issue. According to researchers observations and findings, given below are some of the strategies that unions claimed to be using to promote gender equality in trade unions in Sri Lanka.

The researcher, during this study made effort to obtain information and details of what unions have initiated with this intention of promoting women's rights within unions. Accordingly, the researcher found that twelve out of the 25 unions that responded to the survey had a women's committee or women's wing (some unions referred to these groups as 'Women's Working Groups, Women's Commissions, Women's Advisory Groups and Women's Departments). Eight of the unions said that they are considering establishing a women's committee. The others did not have and do not have plans to establish women only groups in their unions. The role of these 'women-only groups', as per all the union leaders interviewed was to 'voice' women workers needs and priorities. According to the in- depth interviews with union leaders and according to the results and findings of the FGDs with union women, a women's group within a union is supposed to be a 'space for discussion' amongst union women.

> "Ideally' a 'women-only group' in a trade union should provide women members with effective and helpful representation within a union, help boost the visibility of their existence within the trade union, lobby and promote gender equality policies and monitor their implementation, raise issues that are related to women workers, organize women workers, represent women workers and empower women workers through educational and awareness raising activities" (FGD, Coordinator of the TUWF, 52).

The democratic participation of members of 'women's wings' in important decision making discussions is however questionable. The majority of the women interviewed believed that these 'women's wings' or 'women's committees' have been formed to 'fulfill requirements and requests or demands of the Global Union Federations (GUF) that the unions are affiliated to'.

> *"Our union has a women's wing and I am a member. Our activities and contributions are limited to things like organizing New Year festivals and other activities identified as 'women's work"* (member of the TUWF, 47).

There is debate on whether it is a good idea to have a separate women's group within unions to raise women workers' concerns as opposed to integrating women into existing leadership structures within unions. Some researchers have pointed out that these women-only structures provide a platform from which women can develop their strengths, advance their concerns and access empowering positions (Parker, 2003).

However this study revealed that the women-only groups are separate from the conventional decision-making bodies of the trade unions and therefore they are far from contributing to the collective bargaining processes. Role of the women-only groups of some unions was to organize workshops and special events such as community support and welfare events, cultural and sports days etcetera. Hence, it is obvious that these 'special' groups are powerless and non-influential when it comes to making decisions in their respective trade unions. Some unions have these women-only groups as per the requests and requirements of their affiliated Global Union Federations[50] (GUFs). The 'Red Flag Movement' attached to the CPWU seemed to be an exemption. The members of the Red Flag movement found their group as a strong, influential group with a voice and power.

All the twelve union leaders interviewed said they reserved places for female members for educational programmes and training opportunities but pointed out that most of the time, there were no suitable female members for overseas training as the level of English proficiency of female members was low. All the union members interviewed in this study sample said they organize 'activities' on the International Women's Day (March 08) and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25). Ninety per cent of the unions interviewed had some space for women in their union magazines; publications, web pages and campaign materials. The balance 10% was willing to give this space to women members in the future.

All the unions surveyed had links with donor agencies such as the International Labour Organisation, the American Center for International Labour Solidarity, International Trade Union Congress and other Global Union Federations (GUFs) such as the Public Services International. Three unions in the sample were affiliated with GUFs. Majority of the unions in the study sample had received or receive funds from

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[50] A global union federation is an international federation of national and regional trade unions organizing in specific industry sectors or occupational groups, previously known as international trade secretariats [ITSs] - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_union_federation

international donors for activities related to promoting worker rights and gender equality. All these unions in the sample have had at least one leadership training programme for their women members during the past two years.

"Women's leadership programmes are held mainly to fulfill donor requirements" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 57).

The study disclosed that no proper follow up had been carried out for these trainings and mostly these have been one off events.

Patriarchy is a result of social construction of gender. Patriarchy spearheads men's control, which leads to discrimination against women. Because of inequality and discrimination against women, they get fewer opportunities to develop their leadership skills. This leads to the disempowerment of women and creates negative perceptions of women's leadership capabilities. Accordingly, therefore it is presumed that women lack the capabilities, skills and competencies that are necessary to be leaders. Women, consequently get only limited gateways or get no opportunities at all to attain leadership positions in trade unions. If there are no strong women at the leadership level in trade unions, the voice of women workers will not be raised and heard. Women's concerns will not be addressed and this will lead to further subordination of women workers. Subordination makes women powerless. Powerless women have no place in the trade union leadership sphere. This pattern is inter related and goes on.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to identify obstacles women face in attaining trade union leadership positions.

In exploring reasons of under-representation of women in trade union leadership positions in Sri Lanka, this study reinforces the fact that women have a low level of representation at leadership levels in trade unions in Sri Lanka. Even in trade unions formed in workplaces with a majority of women workers, women were under represented at leadership levels. Not a single female trade union member held the position of a General Secretary in a trade union that had male and female members. It was clear that most of the women in executive positions in trade unions in Sri Lanka were either Treasurers or in joint or deputizing positions. The findings demonstrate that women in women's wings and women's committees in trade unions rarely get the opportunity to participate in negotiations. It was also evident that there was little effort by unions to institutionalize gender equality policies.

The study disclosed that the poor ratio of women in trade union decision making bodies is due to many social, cultural, economic and psychological reasons. The study revealed that having women only groups, women's wings and activities such as women's day celebrations alone would not enhance women's leadership in trade unions.

The main obstacles that hinder women unionists in Sri Lanka entering leadership positions in trade unions identified in this study were gender role stereotypes, attitudes and other socio-cultural constraints, imbalanced division of family responsibilities, trade union culture, political unionism, inadequate language, leadership and IT skills, non-familiarity with union structures, lack of confidence, discrimination and gender based violence, nepotism and favoritism in trade unions, lack of affirmative action and political will. Gender stereotypes resulting from the social construction of gender in a patriarchal society was identified as the core reason of the construction of all the overwhelming hurdles for gender equality in trade union leadership positions. Imbalanced division of family responsibilities was identified as a main obstacle in this study, reinforcing the fact that 'women in Sri Lanka shoulder the greater share of child care and domestic responsibilities'. This imbalanced division of family responsibilities is socially constructed. A patriarchal society expects the women to take care of children, take care of the elders in the household and to do all the household errands.

According to the researcher's observations and analysis of available literature, stereotyping of women's roles is seen all over the world. The existing literature accentuates that even though the cultures of countries worldwide are different the perceptions on women are similar. The social construction of the roles and expectations of women and men while they were young girls and boys results in different behaviors and choices that impact on whatever they do. Gender stereotypes in patriarchal social relations make women not wanting to lead and not wanting to be led by other women. Breaking down gender stereotypes is the most important step to promote women's equal engagement in decision making. Attitudes, norms and values which describe and manipulate gender roles and behavior in society have to be changed.

Breaking down gender stereotypes is not just the responsibility of trade unions. At all levels, there should be 'change'; attitudinal change, starting with the way that girls and boys are socialized and educated from a very young age. All the interviewees in this study highlighted the importance of gender sensitization at all levels; within unions, households, schools and in the society at large to change attitudes. The role of the media in changing attitudes was highlighted at FGDs conducted for this study.

The majority of the women unionists interviewed in this study said that the media must be encouraged to expose positive images of women rather than showcasing negative stories and images that further stereotype women. They also pointed out that more airtime should be given to highlight achievements of women and women leaders, women in nontraditional occupations etcetera. Engaging men to build harmony and consensus for gender equality and balanced representation was also an area highlighted by majority of the respondents. All male union leaders interviewed also believed that this could be a good strategy,

"It is important that men realize the value of balanced gender representation. If we make men be part of this 'changing process', they will feel 'important' and 'included' and will tend to support the initiative" (member of the TUWF, 39).

"Husbands should be sensitized through awareness raising programmes, if possible" (member of the TUWF, 47).

The few female union leaders interviewed were able to identify a mentor, a woman leader, in the Sri Lankan trade union movement. They believed that stories and highlights of women leaders (local and overseas) could inspire potential young trade union women. Space should be provided to share women's experiences in union work, to share success stories and to discuss obstacles, opportunities and strategies used for dealing with barriers in attaining leadership positions. Respondents suggested that women holding high level decision-making positions in politics, business organisations etcetera also should come in to share their experiences, as there are only a very few women in trade union leadership. Retired, older experienced female members who have been active in union work also could come in as mentors. Interviewees (TUWF) noted that mentoring should be incorporated into unions as a strategy to enhance women's leadership.

The members of the Trade Union Women's Forum (TUWF), the main sample of this study, stressed that trade union women (will) benefit immensely from various trainings they receive. The study revealed that most of the skills development and training programmes for union women were being conducted and facilitated by 'outsiders' such as International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and therefore sometimes irrelevant in preparing women in Sri Lanka with leadership skills. Majority of the female interviewees believed that it would have been better if the trainings were designed taking into consideration the input and suggestions of trade union female members and with the participation of trade union leaders. They also said that it is important that the unions take the initiative of organizing trainings for their members, with the support of international donors, if necessary. Union leadership involves many skills. Negotiating and bargaining skills, conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, public speaking, communication, language skills, computer/IT skills, organizing, mobilization, lobbying and advocacy skills were identified as some of the main aptitudes that union leaders should essentially posses.

The survey highlights the training needs of these skills in settings dominated by women. Such training programs targeting potential women leaders not only enhance leadership skills but also gives the participants the opportunity to network with each other. The respondents pointed out that having mixed groups of diverse union women in trainings, from different unions with different political agenda is better than having trainings for individual unions separately. Bringing in diverse unions together creates important space for discussion, enables union women to share their stories, both successes and failures and gives them opportunities to compare situations across unions. The sharing of information and networking across unions, in the view of the members of the TUWF, adds a vivacity and liveliness to activities. This strategy could lead to creating 'peer groups' and women union members anticipating leadership could immensely benefit from learning from peers going through similar phases and experiences in union life. Networking was identified as an important step towards promoting women's leadership in unions as it provides a supporting atmosphere for women entering leadership positions.

The research revealed that some trade unions have developed gender equality policies, but for these policies to have real effect, they need to have a focus on gender balance in union decision-making

structures. The importance of having gender balance and equality endorsed at all levels of the union was highlighted as a very important aspect by the interviewees (TUWF). Including a clause on 'gender equality' in constitutions of unions was one of the suggestions that came up in this regard. However, it appears that trade unions have been slow in adopting and implementing gender equality policies they propose.

Whether or not to have quotas for women for leadership positions was something that was discussed intensively in FGDs. Half of the female unionists interviewed pointed out that having a quota guaranteeing them at least 25% of seats at leadership level would help increase women's participation in leadership positions in trade unions. However, the researcher strongly recommends that the quotas should be proportionate. For others there was no agreement regarding the need for quotas as they believed that a quota system alone will not be adequate to promote women's leadership. However the respondents agreed that quotas along with a range of other support measures and changes in the system would enhance women's participation in leadership positions in unions.

The majority of the women unionists interviewed stressed that unions should place some term limits on elected offices, leaders and office bearers.

> *"Trade union leaders in our country are aged, in their 60s, 70, and some are in their 80s and 90s. These aged male leaders never retire. There is no strong secondary leadership. How can there be a secondary leadership if the youngsters are not given the opportunity?"* (member of the TUWF, 34).

The majority of the women interviewed pointed out that term limits would send a persuasive signal to younger female (and male) members that they could get the chance to reach the top leadership ranks of their union. Some unions have term limits but this does not seem to stop present leaders from pledging themselves to be reelected again and again.

The majority of the interviewed unionists, males as well as females believed that through systematic gender sensitization, the patriarchal, male dominated culture of unions could be gradually tackled. One of the key issues tied to the culture of unions were identified by the interviewed TUWF members as the 'male oriented and male centered decisions and the atmospheres of unions'. With regard to meetings, the time and the location of meetings should be suitable for women members. Conducting union meetings within working hours would be helpful. The work-life balance issue should be addressed but at the mean time, unions should encourage the participation of women with small children too, to actively participate in union activities by providing necessary support such as child care facilities during important meeting. The needs of the members with family responsibilities should be taken in to consideration when timing the meetings.

Sexist language should be strictly avoided during meetings and trade union activities should maintain professionalism. Nepotism and favoritism are subtle and overpowering forms of corruption. Nepotism

and favoritism impede justice and fairness in important decisions taken with regard to trade union leadership. There should be transparency in trade union activities, especially in electing and selecting persons for decision making positions in trade unions.

Undervaluing of women's work and skills and the valuing of women's talents and leadership styles have to be addressed through equality practices and actions.

> *"Unions are not only for men. Men should realise that we are also a part of it and that it is our right and not a privilege to be part of all important union matters"* (member of the TUWF, 51).

The majority of the women unionists interviewed believed that there should be transparency, especially when it comes to selecting or electing leaders and budgeting in unions. Half of the union leaders interviewed suggested that it is important to establish a committee within unions to promote non discrimination measures and gender equality.

> *"Appointing a suitable, independent women's adviser(or advisors) to provide assistance and guidance to help female members conquer the hurdles while climbing up the leadership ladder will help promote women taking part in leadership roles in unions"* (member of the TUWF, 59).

All union leaders interviewed found the above suggestion appropriate. All the women members interviewed pointed out that it is important to consult women members when preparing collective bargaining agreements as women have women specific worker rights issues they want to be included in bargaining agenda. All women unionist interviewed stressed that priorities and concerns of women members should be mainstreamed and women leaders needed to be persuaded with extensive responsibilities.

There is no accurate gender disaggregated data on membership and women in decision making positions in most of the Sri Lankan trade unions. Most of the statistics given by the respondents were estimates. Accurate statistics, information (age, educational level, marital status etcetera) of members were not available in most of the unions (or they did not want to share it with the researcher). Having accurate information and gender disaggregated statistics on the representation of women and men at all levels of trade unions is crucial if gender equality is to be effectively monitored. This data can also be very useful in preparing collective bargaining agreements, to bring in issues pertaining to women to the negotiating table, to show how female membership is central to future union policies and strategies and also for the credibility and recognition of the union. Unions should have a proper system to collected gender disaggregated data of their union members. This data has to be regularly updated and should be tracked over time to evaluate the progress on achieving gender equality.

Addressing barriers women face in participating in union activities and progressing to key leadership roles in unions will improve unions' ability to attract the best possible talent and to tap into the growth

potential of organising women workers. It is important that unions intentionally encourage women's leadership through the strategies outlined here. Doing so is vital to creating healthy working families and providing all workers a sense of autonomy and well-being.

"Trade unions need to have more women leaders in order to successfully address women's issues and to attract more women into trade unions" (FGD, member of the TUWF, 59).

Considering time and monetary constraints to carry out a complete enumeration of all unions in Sri Lanka, the sample had to be restricted to 25 women from 25 different trade unions belonging to the Trade Union Women's Forum (TUWF) and twelve leaders leading twelve trade unions in Sri Lanka. This is a limitation of the study. It was not possible to collect exact and accurate statistical data on trade unions apart from approximate figures as none of the trade unions had exact statistical data. Calculations of the membership, therefore, are estimates based on trade union sources.

One could argue that male trade union leaders could address the rights and issues of female workers. Males seldom fully grasp the needs that female workers have in relation to their work conditions. Most women's issues are workers' issues and not just women's issues. However, these concerns are left out by men. As much as women workers need trade unions, the unions need women members and need both male and female leaders in their trade unions to be fully representative. There are many gender issues in the workplaces today that need urgent attention. Women tend to place gender issues on the agenda more than men do.

A 2009 report by the ILO called 'Global Employment Trends for Women'[51] has reconfirmed that gender inequality remains an issue within labour markets globally. ILO's 2012 report called 'Global Employment Trends 2012[52]' points out that among women in the world, 50.5% are in vulnerable employment, a rate that exceeds the corresponding share for men (48.2%).Those women who are able to secure salaried employment are often not receiving the same remuneration as their male counterparts. Gender differentials may be due to a variety of factors, including crowding of women in low-paying industries and differences in skills and work experience, but may also be the result of discrimination.

So given the constraints that women are facing today, promoting gender equality and empowering women is pivotal to achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all. Collective bargaining[53] can be a powerful instrument to reduce the gender inequality in workplaces and address concerns, issues and priorities of working women. Collective bargaining also could be used as a key to implement gender

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[51] In the context of International Women's Day-2009, the ILO released 'Global Employment Trends for Women' 2009-a report that assesses anticipated regional and global impacts of the global financial crisis from a gender-perspective. It considers both male and female labour force participation, unemployment, and vulnerable employment (informal sector).

[52] http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?article3735

[53] "Collective bargaining is a process of voluntary negotiation between employers and trade unions aimed at reaching agreements which regulate working conditions. Collective agreements usually set out wage scales, working hours, training, health and safety, overtime, grievance mechanisms and rights to participate in workplace or company affairs" - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_bargaining

mainstreaming[54]. For women workers' concerns to be heard and integrate equality in collective bargaining, it is important that women are represented in negotiating teams. The negotiating teams consist of the leaders of the union(s) and they bargain with the employer(s) on behalf of their members. Women and men have different priorities because of their different gender roles in the household and community. Women are sensitive towards women's concerns and if women are equally represented in the leadership level in unions it will be feasible to add priorities of working women to the collective bargaining agenda.

As long as women in trade union leadership positions continues to be under represented and the interests of its female membership continue to be marginalized, the basic standards of equality and justice in trade unions, workplaces and society will stay impossible to attain. With progressively more women participating in the labour force, inclusion of women's standpoints in trade unions is important to ensure that their concerns are represented in labour markets. By claiming leadership, women can change their lives, their unions, their workplaces, and their communities to reflect their needs.

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[54] "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality." - United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) -July, 1997

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ANNEXURES

Annex 01: Trade Unions in the Study Sample

1. The National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)

2. Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS)

3. Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya (SLNSS)

4. Sri Lanka Local Government Trade Union Federation (SLLGTUF)

5. Confederation of Public Service Independent Trade Unions (COPSITU)

6. The Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union (FTZ&GSEU)

7. Public Services United Nurses Union (PSUNU)

8. Government Nursing Officers Association (GNOA)

9. Principals' Union (PU)

10. Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union (CTTU)

11. Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union (LJEWU)

12. Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC)

13. United Federation of Labour (UFL)

14. National Union for Migrant Workers in Sri Lanka (NUMS)

15. Ceylon Estate Staff Union (CESU)

16. All Ceylon Federation of Free Trade Unions (ACFFTU)

17. National Workers' Congress (NWC)

18. Health Sector Trade Union Alliance (HSTUA)

19. Union of Postal and Telecommunication Officers (UPTO)

20. Ceylon Teachers' Union

21. All Ceylon Commercial and Industrial Workers Union (ACCIWU)

22. Up-Country Workers Front (UCWF)

23. Podu Sevaka Sangamaya (PSS - National Water Supply and Drainage Board)

24. Labour Officers Union (LOU)

25. Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA)

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