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“Support on information dissemination, training and promoting dialogue between employers and domestic workers”

Presentation at a Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) 2011 High-Level Meeting on “Domestic Workers at the Interface of Migration and Development: Action to Expand Good Practice”

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Introduction

The Jamaica Household Workers Association welcomes the decision of the Swiss Chair of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, to focus on global care workers including domestic workers, as part of the continuing commitment of Governments to making gender and family a central focus of the GFMD. We thank the Government of Jamaica for hosting this meeting. Domestic workers or household workers as they are known are integral to our country’s labour force. According to STATIN statistics for 2010 show that there were 58,500 households with employed persons, however there are at least 100,000 domestic workers nationwide. Domestic work can be regarded as the largest single female occupational category of workers. As women workers, we contribute significantly to national development through the performance of our paid and unpaid work. We also have to struggle to combine our roles to look after our families. In my presentation I will outline:

- The situation of domestic workers in Jamaica and the rights violations we face;
- The Jamaica Household Workers Association and what our organization aims to do;
- Good practice examples of our services and their positive impact; and
- Challenges for implementation and strategies to expand and upscale our services.

The Situation of Domestic Workers in Jamaica

The majority of Domestic Workers in Jamaica are women between the ages of 25-65 years. Most of us started this type of work as children before 15 years of age which means we were child domestic workers. Many of our members are originally from rural areas and came to Kingston to go to school but did not go until much older, did not go to school regularly. This also means we could be considered as survivors of internal human trafficking as children. Today most of us are single mothers with 3-6 children each. Most of us are literate but have very little education and only a few have any formal certification.

However, some domestic workers are going to school and are enrolled in the Government of Jamaica's Human Employment and Resource Training (**HEART**) which I will discuss below.

The Rights Violations Faced by Jamaican Domestic Workers – in the Workplace and in Society

Some of the problems that domestic workers face include: very long working hours, over loaded job description, low wages, no overtime pay, and limited access to social security – some employers refuse to pay statutory deductions to the National Insurance Scheme which provides domestic workers with maternity leave benefit. We sometimes face various forms of abuse from some employers: sexual, emotional, and physical abuse. Most of the physical abuse is from children of employers. Some of our members are even subjected to forced labour and wrongful dismissal.

The Jamaica Household Workers Association

The JHWA is a non-government, voluntary, organization that was set up in 1991 to represent the needs and interest of household workers. The JHWA evolved out of a workshop held in 1990 that was sponsored by the Jamaican Bureau of Women Affairs in 1990. Over 175 domestic workers attended, many of whom came together to form this organization. We now have over 1600 members.

The main aims of the JHWA are to:-

- Empower domestic workers and ensure fair and just working conditions and wages
- Provide training opportunities and education seminars for both domestic workers and employers
- Provide advocacy services, lobby for laws and provisions to better protect domestic workers
- Provide ethical job opportunities for domestic workers; and to
- Educate and sensitize the public on the value of domestic work

Good Practice Examples of the JHWA's Services and their Positive Impact

The JHWA provides a "Skills for Life" training programme that empowers domestic workers to improve their proficiency in the job and raises public awareness that domestic work is real work that requires real skills and deserves fair pay and terms and conditions. We also want to give women opportunities to find work in other fields. We teach food preparation, housekeeping, child care and care for the elderly, cake baking and decorating, drapery-making and soft-furnishing. We had training in customer service and computer skills, office management, accounting principles, English Language and Mathematics, conflict resolution and public speaking and communication. Twenty four (24) domestic workers recently

graduated from HEART National Training Agency with a higher level of training in Food Preparation and housekeeping.

The programme's positive impacts are evident through the many success stories of our graduates, especially of young women who have made the transition from domestic work into higher-paying jobs in Jamaica and overseas. For instance one of my first graduates now has her own successful catering business here in Kingston. Another is an early childhood teacher. We supported another young woman to receive her nursing qualification and she is now a nurse in the United States.

The JHWA has a telephone helpline to assist domestic workers. The helpline disseminates information on the minimum wage, terms and conditions of employment, statutory deductions, sexual harassment etc. Assistance is sometimes given to persons who need small sums for bus fares. Occasionally the JHWA tries to find temporary accommodation and shelter for household workers in crisis.

We are committed to gender-sensitive services. We host workshops on women's empowerment and we are assisted by resource persons from the Bureau of Women's Affairs and civil society organizations from the Association of Women's Organizations of Jamaica (AWOJA) and the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre (WROC). The JHWA also has close links with the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, International Domestic Workers Network, International Labour Organization (Caribbean) and FES. We are working with the Gender Institute and the ILO on a survey to get accurate data on the numbers of domestic workers in Jamaica and their condition.

We have frequent session with the National Housing Trust to educate our members on how to access low-income housing, and for labour officials to provide information on the laws that govern domestic workers. We also host workshops on HIV/AIDS and accessing health services and fundraising skills for members involved in campaigns, like our 2010 Decent Work Campaign for the ILO Convention.

A new service we have begun providing, is education with employers and employee to educate both parties about their rights and obligations. The Jamaica Employers Federation is now working with us in going island wide to sensitize employers about the decent work convention so we can go from resistance to acceptance. One of our main practices is having an excellent relationship with employers,

government and trade union. There must be tripartite relationship to be successful. We also tried to find jobs for our members to ensure that they are placed in ethical employment with fair wages and terms and conditions. Both employers and employee can call or walk in to make their requests. So far we are successful in finding many workers with better paying jobs that are above the national minimum wage. Like the training programme, the employment service set a precedent of honouring domestic work as a profession and finding employment overseas, ensuring that their migration is safe, legal and decent.

Some of the positive impacts of our work are that:

- We network with other women's civil society groups, and we tap into their wider resources to support our services, campaigning and advocacy. We have also applied for trade union status.
- We design services from the ground-up that are targeted to meet domestic workers needs, based on our own experience. Our committee members are all women domestic workers.
- We are a trusted service delivery provider and collaborate closely with many Government bodies **like the HEART Trust/NTA, Bureau of Women's Affairs and National Housing Trust.**
- We ensure that more local and migrant domestic workers find jobs with fair wages and good terms and conditions through our Employment Bureau.
- We empower women, especially young women, to find sustainable and higher-paying employment and to move beyond domestic work.
- We are trusted by both workers and employers, because our services are not only for workers. Sometimes we act as an intermediary in employment disputes and refer both parties to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. We are on the Minimum Wage Advisory Commission, together with the Jamaica Employers' Federation, that directly advises the Ministry. Recently we successfully advocated to raise the national minimum wage from JMD 4070 to JMD 4500 per week, roughly USD 53. We intend to keep working with employers and employers' groups.
- We promote our services through the media and we keep domestic workers in the public eye. Journalists have covered our training programmes and our Decent Work Campaign, which included a concert and march for the ILO Convention, in newspapers, on radio and on TV. I and other members conduct outreach on radio shows and TV programs across the nation.

Challenges for Implementation and Strategies to Upscale and Expand Good Practices:

The challenges the JHWA faces so far are that:

- We are mainly Kingston-based, and are not truly national. We need stronger links with other domestic workers' groups in the Caribbean.
- We have no full-time staff, and the voluntary nature of the organization limits our scope. Like other domestic workers around the world, our members have very little time off to devote to our work.
- In practice, many workers and employers do not pay their statutory deductions and we need to implement the National Insurance Scheme.
- We have limited funds and resources – both human and financial. The Bureau of Women's Affairs has very kindly provided us with an office a meeting room and technical support. However we are in dire need of basic office equipment and we need administrative staff. Presently we do not even have a computer, fax or copier to make our work more efficient.

Some strategies to expand our good practices and to move the JHWA forward include:

- Strengthening our parish chapters, this will increase our membership base and allow us to serve domestic workers outside of Kingston. We must build our members' capacity for outreach – for example one woman recruited new members by speaking about the JHWA her local church, after she gained confidence and public speaking skills from being part of our Decent Work campaign.
- Building a regional network of domestic workers in the Caribbean, which builds on our existing strong relationship with the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) in Trinidad and Tobago. We are hoping to launch this network in the coming months.
- Ensuring that our association is sustainable and financially viable. One way to do this is by collecting dues so that members can have ownership of the organization. We need capacity-building for our leadership in fundraising, management skills, advocacy and communication and strategic planning.
- Intensifying public education efforts to increase awareness of domestic workers' rights, including the obligation for both workers and employers to contribute to the National Insurance Scheme.
- Creating a database with up-to-date information on our members, and on all domestic workers in Jamaica – their numbers, the rights violations they face. We also need action-oriented policy research on domestic workers in Jamaica, to identify trends including migration patterns within and outside the Caribbean, and to determine what services workers need. This research must be translated into laws and policies that protect domestic workers.
- Finally, deepening our partnerships is crucial. Expanding our workshops and seminars with employers is an important step, and we must continue to work with the active civil society groups,

especially women's organizations and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and other stake holders to move forward meaningfully.

Thank you.