

Canada among the countries where women are left behind : Lack of national policy on child care seen as a barrier to entering business ventures ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

While life has improved for millions of people around the world over the past century, women still seem to be getting left behind.

A recent World Bank study reports women perform 66 per cent of the world's work, produce 50 per cent of the food, but earn 10 per cent of the income and own one per cent of the property.

The report - titled *Women, Business and the Law* - says that life for women is still considerably tougher than it is for men. The study looked at women in 141 countries.

The data were collected between July 2010 and July 2011 and the report was based on six specific areas that are often barriers to a woman's ability to climb the social ladder: equal access to public institutions; ability to own, control or inherit property; restrictions on the ability to get a job; incentives to work; ability to build credit and access to courts.

Kathleen Lahey is a professor in the faculty of law at Queen's University who has spent many years studying law, gender and equity issues around the world. For Lahey, this recent report represents a continuation of the status quo.

"I would describe it as a slight improvement," Lahey said.

"However, the most intractable figure is percentage of the world's wealth, which has remained at, or less than, one per cent since anyone ever began thinking about it."

The report showed women represent 49.6 per cent of the world's population, but only 40.8 per cent of the world's workforce.

"When because of traditions, social taboos or simple prejudice, half of the world's population is prevented from making its contribution to the life of a nation, the economy will suffer," the report says. Lahey agrees.

"If any other class of people characterized were marked out in as many ways as women from participating equally in economic and political relations, people would be extremely agitated about it," Lahey said. "But gender equality is probably one of the most challenging areas of equality and is probably one of the most deeply entrenched set of contemporary state practices."

The framework to better the lives of women is currently in place, but making governments take action is proving to be much more difficult, said Lahey.

"For the last 35 years, there has been a growing network of international treaties that virtually all countries in the world have signed onto," Lahey said. "All of which involve an obligation to enact constitutional and legal provisions to eliminate discrimination. The more fully countries honour these commitments the quicker women will approach a position of equality, but the figures show that it is an incredibly slow process."

There are a few key factors that restrict the ability of women to advance economically and the biggest is unfair distribution of labour. Surprisingly, Canada is not a nation to be emulated.

"It is very difficult for women to do any kind of economically productive work when they are still responsible for the lion's share of the unpaid work - the children, the household, the elderly and the disabled," Lahey said.

"So, obviously, a government like Canada's (which) has been heavily criticized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development for not having a national child-care program is actively impeding women from being able to even think about moving into a business or that type of entrepreneurial activity."

-reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Region: Canada ^[2]

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