

## **Gender and Trade Union Development: A Situational Analysis of Jamaica**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper is an examination of the gender relations that exist between men and women in the Jamaican labour movement. Women within Jamaican trade unions, despite their contribution to the movement's development, are continuously exempted from positions of leadership because of socio-cultural and institutional factors that exist to protect male hegemony within the labour movement. The paper presents a case study with background information to assess the gender structure of trade unions under the Jamaica Confederation of the Trade Unions (JCTU). This helps us to better understand the relationship between gender and leadership in trade union organisations. This study adds to the available literature on the issue. It provides an analytical framework to critically examine the leadership structure of Jamaican union organizations and areas for further research on women's issues in the labour movement. The research reveals that the trade union's culture, which encourages patriarchy, has compromised its ability to counter institutional prejudices that have subjugated women at all levels within the labour movement.*

The focus of the paper is on the status of women in the trade union movement and the myths surrounding their advanced participation at the leadership level. The view held is that women have made significant strides and are now on the same level as men in the corridors of power in trade unions. In addition, it is argued that women have surpassed men in the sphere of education and training (Chevannes 1999; Bailey 2000). This gives rise to the belief in some quarters that women are now more powerful than their male counterparts whose marginalized status has increased within the academic and professional spheres.

This situation is contrary to the experiences of women in the trade union movement because of entrenched gender barriers that serve to exclude women from prominent positions of leadership. A historical overview of the experiences of women within the Caribbean trade union movement reveals that the movement has

not evolved to embrace principles of inclusivity and equity within its pyramidal structure. As such, union women are persistently undermined by the patriarchal values that have governed gender relations within the movement since the early 1900s. Included in this discussion is not only the conspicuous invisibility of women as leaders in the trade union movement, but also an examination of the strategies and efforts employed by women over the years to counter their suppression and confront their subordination within trade unions.

In this paper, the concept of the 'glass ceiling' is explored in order to provide a more concise examination of the power relations that exist between women and men in the trade union movement. The prevalence of a 'glass ceiling' serves to stifle capacity building within trade unions by maintaining a hierarchical structure that allocates power based on sex rather than competence and performance. However, if the trade union movement wants to survive within the global arena it must facilitate the empowerment of workers irrespective of social and biological distinctions. Essentially, the 'globalization of work' has created new dimensions to labour that have compromised the livelihood of men and women throughout the developing world. The concepts 'glass ceiling' and 'mirror' are contextualized in this study to exemplify the experience of women in union organizations. For this research, the 'glass ceiling' can be understood as a set of ideological and institutional customs as well as practices and behaviours that encourage the preservation of a system of patriarchy within the labour movement in the Caribbean. The leadership structure of trade unions 'mirrors' societal values pertaining to gender and leadership.

The study also explores the experiences of women as trade union leaders and the strategies they employ in their struggle for dignity. Women today have made significant advancements, both academically and professionally, but their achievements are not reflected in the leadership of trade unions. Men still occupy the most prominent positions despite the laudable performance of women in various capacities within the movement that would qualify them for leadership. The paper argues that the 'glass ceiling' in trade unions compromises the prosperity of the modern trade unions and violates the principles agreed upon in the UNDP's Millennium Development Goals which promotes gender equality.

and the empowerment of women, including those in trade unions. Trade unions have accepted, in principle, the need for affirmative action to promote gender equity as stipulated by the ILO and other UN agencies. These requirements propose that leadership should be 30-40% female. Despite formal adoption of these principles by trade unions, few women in these organizations are appointed leaders because of cultural biases about their capacity to lead. Simply put, men enjoy more power within trade unions because of the perception that women are inferior based on their socialization and physiological development. This belief is in keeping with the general view in all patriarchal societies which associate power and social prestige with masculinity. In this patriarchal system, men are accorded more social resources and privileges than women.

The final section of the paper provides a case study of the structure of the ten trade unions under the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions in 2008 and the independent Nurses Association of Jamaica. This case study provides an opportunity to examine the structure and gender composition of leadership structures within the executive of these organizations. The study also provides data on the composition of the presidential positions over a ten-year period. This helps to identify leadership trends that have persisted within union organizations. The study also gives a more comprehensive understanding of trade union culture in Jamaica and the gender dynamics that exists within the movement.

## WOMEN AGAINST ALL ODDS: UNDERSTANDING GENDER AND MOBILITY IN TRADE UNIONS

During the UN 'Decade for Women,' significant numbers of women entered the labour force engaging in paid employment. The trade union movement has benefited significantly from this increase in female workers in the labour market. However, few mechanisms have been implemented to ensure that access to leadership within the union movement is equitable. As a result, women's involvement at the leadership level remains low, and issues affecting them continue to be neglected by trade unions in the collective bargaining process.

A few women have made their way to positions of influence in the trade union movement in the Caribbean. In order to achieve

this, some had to surrender personal relationships while others had to develop strategies for survival and advancement. Within the trade union movement itself, there are women's committees that recognize that the exclusion and continued marginalization of women will deprive the movement of the vitality and strength that women can and will bring to the organization. With this increased awareness, some unions are developing strategies to make female members more visible in leadership roles. They organise recruitment drives and identify specific needs of women through education and training programmes. Nevertheless, women recognize that considerably more work is needed to attain gender equality and equity within the trade union structure.

Wirth observes, "It is still extremely difficult for women to move laterally into strategic areas . . . and then upwards through the central pathways to key executive positions in the pyramidal structure . . . discrimination is greatest where the most power is exercised" (Wirth 2001, 42-169). Wirth also highlights the importance of trade unions as vehicles that can effectively organize workers and promote gender equality throughout the world of work. There has been a feminization of the labour force with more women entering the labour market. Yet the increased participation of women in the labour force has not improved the quality of the jobs they perform, nor does it reflect their presence at the leadership level of the trade union movement.

The United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year. In that year an ILO Declaration stated that: "All measures shall be taken to guarantee women's right to work as the inalienable right of every human being" (World of Work 2000, 34:2). Upward of 100 million women entered the work force over the ten years following that declaration. Yet, there were no changes in legislation or mindset to cope with their entry and growth in the labour market, or to address the vast differences between male and female wages and status. One reason is that it was not considered essential to prepare men for women's entry into the labour market. In contrast it was considered crucial to prepare women for entry into a male dominated movement. The persistence of gender discrimination within the movement is partly the result of men's unpreparedness to accept women in influential positions that are traditionally reserved for men.

The UN Decade for Women provided the opportunity to examine the construct of male dominance and openly discuss women's predetermined roles. This heightened women's understanding of the unequal distribution of power across the gender divide and also magnified the issues and allowed the male leadership to see clearly the disadvantages of maintaining their dominance in labour. Additionally, the mirror provides a clearer reflection of the *glass ceiling* as a dominant ideology which perpetuates discrimination against women in leadership in the social and professional spheres.

The glass ceiling within the trade union movement indicates that women will not rise to the centre of power in these organizations. The few women that break through the glass ceilings face other hurdles as they take their place in the corridors of power. Breaking through the glass ceiling could however mean equity and equality for some women and success for others. Organizations like trade unions that seek equity and equality should place women's issues on their organization's agenda. Indicators of success could mean triumph over the oppression experienced by women and greater gender equality in women attaining a particular leadership position in the organization. In the trade union movement, the focus on equity rather than access to leadership is the focus for an individual or group.

In her reference to the International Labour Organization's global programme, 'More and Better Jobs for Women' designed to improve, "the quantity and quality of women's employment," Wirth notes however, that:

The programme recognizes that while some women have made inroads in previously male-dominated occupations and have breached the glass ceiling, most of them remain disadvantaged relative to men in terms of their opportunities and treatment in the labour market, their participation in economic decision-making, their access to training and productive resources and vulnerability to retrenchment and unemployment (Wirth 2001, 163).

Given that the ILO's observation as noted by Wirth is based on the experiences of union women, the mirror must be the focus in order to bring equality and equity to the male dominated trade union movement. The reflections in the mirror moved union women to compare the relationship that exists between themselves

and men in the trade union movement. This led to union women re-examining their perception of themselves and their roles in the trade union movement. This was possible through specially designed training activities organized by various worker organizations and labour colleges in order to engage women and men in self-exploratory exercises.

The process of "reflected appraisal" aptly describes the progression of union women as they work towards removing the gender wall. Once women understood that "each of us develops a self-concept that matches the way we believe others see us" (Adler & Proctor II 2006, 52). It became possible to recognize that any individual who is so heavily relied on in the private sphere as women are for their very sophisticated management and organizational skills must undoubtedly be a valuable constituent to the coordination and efficiency of the union organization. With this understanding of value and competence, it became possible for women to develop their self-concept and overcome the oppressive treatment meted out by union men who have generally kept women away from organizing and negotiating within the public sphere.

An increase in self-worth will strengthen the voices of union women over the years thus changing the nature of relationships between both genders and magnifying the role of women in the trade union movement and leadership. Furthermore, the principles underlying trade unionism oppose the inclusion of prejudices and biases within the organization. It demands equality and equity and therefore presents a channel for union women and men to look at the images reflected and transform the power relations existing between both genders in the wider society. Moreover, the trade union movement is currently under attack and its survival depends on the propensity of the movement to lobby issues that affect men and women in the global workplace. Everywhere in the developing world workers are challenged by infringements related to remuneration, health and social equity.

Globalization demands greater flexibility on the part of workers in every nation state. The process itself has brought with it an escalation in social inequalities such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and social tension, all of which have created a dilemma for nation states. The consequence of this new system for women who represent 70% of the

detrimental, and the number of women heading households worldwide is on the increase (UNIFEM 2008).<sup>1</sup> Their presence as a vital part of the labour force has not improved their position as they remain among the poorest. At the level of political leadership, there has been a slight increase in the number of women to 18.8% worldwide in 2009 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2010). The reality is that even in the best of situations the disadvantaged position in which women fall is indefensible.

The data provided by Women of Our World 2009 indicates that women's unemployment rates are still higher when compared to men. Global unemployment trends in 2008 stood at 6.3% for women compared to 5.9% for men. For 2009, estimates project an increase in female unemployment to 7.4% and male to 7%. This would result in an increase in global unemployment with 24 million to 52 million people unemployed worldwide of which 10 million to 22 million are women (ILO 2009). In Latin America and the Caribbean:

... women lag behind ... and are generally in more precarious working conditions than men and receiving only 71% of male income. Women frequently suffer a dual burden, forced to work at a job for pay and then come back to work in the home. This exposes them to greater physical and mental health risks. Women are now expanding into jobs that are considered hazardous and will require the appropriate level of protection for this additional risk (PAHO 2000, 5:2).

There is a view that the increase in female participation in the labour force has improved the conditions and position of women in the trade union movement. This is indeed a myth; feminization of the workplace has not improved the location of women as they normally occupy jobs that have lower status and less pay than those of men. Statistics from the ILO reveal that in 2006 1.2 billion of the 2.9 billion workers in the world are women (ILO 2007, 59:32). However, more women are employed in low productivity jobs and services or are receiving less money for doing the same types of jobs as men.

The trade union movement accepts that there can be no true democracy without equality and equity for women especially with

1 United Nations Women. 2008. 'Women, Poverty and Economics.' [http://www.unifem.org/about/brochure\\_2.php](http://www.unifem.org/about/brochure_2.php). Retrieved: February 10, 2011.

their heightened entry into the labour force. *The Global Employment Trends for Women for 2007* (ILO 2007) purports that more women out of the total number of women at work are in wage and salary employment than ten years ago. However, the study also reveals that women in the poorer regions are more likely to work as unpaid contributing family members or low-income own account workers in a higher proportion than men. An article by Linda Carty (2002) on gender relations in the Caribbean stated:

Caribbean society is one in which women are central to productive and reproductive development, but ideologically they remain peripheral in analyses and policies of development. . . Although women have always engaged in wage work in the region their employment has been largely confined to the private sector, mostly in menial, low-paying jobs. The state remains the largest employer of those with a post-secondary education in the region, but women do not yet make up 50% of public sector employees in the region. Therefore, one can safely conclude that the higher enrolment numbers of women at UWI does not translate into jobs that are commensurate with their education upon graduation (Carty 2002, 9-10).

The above indicates that generally, organizational structures, including trade unions, are by design patriarchal, and do not facilitate the advancement of women even when they have prepared themselves to access opportunities for advancement.

#### WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONISM – THE CASE OF JAMAICA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The issue of gender in the trade union movement has been continuously debated since the establishment of early international civil and labour organizations focusing on the elimination of cheap labour and gender discrimination within the work place. Gender within Jamaican trade unions is a complex matter that is inextricably linked to wider gender practices within the cultural sphere of the Jamaican society. Gender socialization refers to, “the shaping process during which those values, customs and behavioural norms that account for the sexual differentiation in the adult personal identity and behaviour are transmitted” (Chevannes 2001, 14). Therefore, men and women are taught not only to assume



pertaining to leadership, power and social privileging. Vassell explains that society itself ranks men above women and sanctions their authority to exercise power over women within homes, workplaces and governmental systems from the local to the global levels (Vassell 2006: 251).

The gender structure of Jamaican trade unions is a microcosm of broader gender relations within the general society depicting the socially accepted roles of both genders. The experience of women within the Jamaican labour movement is unique and somewhat mystifying because it contradicts the philosophical underpinnings of equity and equality, both fundamental principles upon which trade unions are established. However, to get a better understanding of the gender dynamics within the contemporary trade union movement it is necessary to undertake a gender analysis of the structure and composition of trade unions in a historical context. Eaton explains that the earliest unions in Jamaica were the Carpenter, Bricklayers and Painters Union otherwise known as the Artisans Union founded in 1898 (Eaton 1962, 69-75). There is also mention made of a Bakers Association formed in 1888 and a Patriotic Club and Mechanics Union formed in 1890. Based on the profile of these early unions it is easy to assess that the gender structure of these organizations would constitute mainly men.

Conversely, the need for early trade unions emerged from the squalid and inhumane conditions experienced by workers employed in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing sectors, which are traditionally comprised of male workers. The low visibility of women within trade union leadership is also associated with the political culture of Jamaican society, as trade unions from their inception are quasi-political institutions existing as conduits between workers and their political leaders. History has proven that politics within Jamaican society is considered to be the domain of men. Politics is traditionally perceived to be a public activity that is dominated by men and requires certain typical masculine characteristics (Randall 1987, 9).

A UNDP study illustrates women's marginality in political leadership, revealing that in 2005, 17.6% of the total number of government ministers was female while 82.4% were men (UNDP 2005). Wedderburn supports this point by providing an analysis of women's involvement in the political leadership of Jamaica. She reports that women accounted for 13% of all parliamentary seats,

furthermore only 41 parish councillors are women compared to 195 male councillors (Wedderburn 2006, 39). The data provided by both studies provides us with a clear indication that gender practices within trade unions and political parties are similar when we assess the gender structure of both organizations. Observably, women's contribution within both organizations is predominantly centred on performing administrative and clerical duties, while men are encouraged to undertake duties that will propel them into positions of leadership.

The globalization process has prompted Jamaican trade unions to embrace Labour Standards and Conventions stipulated by the ILO relating to equity and equality within the structure of trade unions. Among these recommendations is the requirement made by the ILO that women should constitute at least 30% of the executive within trade unions. Since the founding of the ILO in 1919, more than 180 Conventions and over 190 Recommendations have been adopted to improve labour standards by addressing social rights and productive employment (ILO 2005). Despite the acknowledgement of international labour standards by national leaders, the involvement of women within the national trade union movement continues to be defined by the patriarchal values that have existed to preserve male hegemony within the leadership (Phillips 2005, 22).

Although in recent times women have become more visible in politics, some traditional male professions and occupations and within the academy, this visibility has not translated sufficient leadership opportunities for women in the labour movement. Presently, women are crossing into technical areas of employment and are increasingly pursuing careers in engineering, construction and mining. Unfortunately, trade unions have failed to diversify their bargaining procedures to include women who have entered occupational groupings that were traditionally reserved for men.

As a result of the strong male influence within these jobs, women employed within those occupations may experience challenges that are unparalleled by those employed in sex-typical occupations. Females involved in non-traditional occupations are prone to experience discrimination in the form of sexual harassment, low job security and limited promotional opportunities (ILO 2009). To alleviate the challenges experienced by women in the

bargaining procedures in an attempt to encompass the challenges encountered by women crossing into professions predominantly occupied by men. If trade unions intend to become more equitable and inclusive they must be guided by policies and procedures established by national and international bodies geared towards gender equality.

Changing the present status quo within trade unions will also require self-analysis and introspection among membership in order to accept and accommodate women as leaders within the labour movement (Phillips 2005, 51: 14). The scarcity of women at the helm of trade union leadership has served to facilitate their further disenfranchisement within the general labour force. This has resulted in women becoming more exposed to poorer working conditions, lower remuneration rates and higher levels of discrimination when compared to their male counterparts. Evidently, the absence of women within trade union leadership has resulted in a paucity of policies and labour legislation geared towards providing productive and sustainable employment for women.

Therefore, if Jamaican trade unions intend to become 'more visible in the global marketplace they must reconceptualise their perception of women at two levels. The first level speaks to fostering greater ideological pragmatism among membership. This process will encourage gender sensitive practices within union organizations while simultaneously creating greater channels for the upward mobility of women within the movement. Perceptions maintained by both genders pertaining to leadership must be unlearned and discredited if women are to equitably share the reins of power with their male counterparts within union organizations. The patriarchal hierarchy present within Jamaican trade unions cannot be understood simply as a system reinforced only by men but as a complex trans-generational practice perpetuated by both men and women. The second level relates to the institutional framework of these organizations. Traditional notions pertaining to power and leadership within the movement influence the way men and women select or elect members to their executive. It is customary for men to occupy the top leadership positions of president, vice president and general secretary while women are identified with the more clerical and administrative positions within union organizations. If women are to enter these positions of leadership traditional gender labels attached to the aforementioned

categories must be dismantled in order to create gender neutral groupings.

To better understand the dynamics of gender and leadership within Jamaican trade unions, the structure of 11 trade unions in Jamaica was examined and the involvement of women in the leadership assessed. This study on Jamaican trade unions was conducted for three reasons. Firstly, an assessment of the structure of local trade unions assist in determining the involvement level of women in trade union leadership and identifying trends in organizational leadership overtime. Secondly, if there is to be an understanding of the perversity of the glass ceiling phenomenon in trade unions and the wider society, it is imperative to study the structure of national trade unions in order to make recommendations that will alleviate the circumstances of women. According to the ILO, gender inequality coexists and interacts with other forms of inequality, such as age-based and racial inequalities. Thirdly, by examining the culture of Jamaican trade unions we may garner a general understanding of trade union culture within the wider region. There appears to be a dearth in research focusing on gender dynamics within the regional trade union movement especially on sensitive issues relating to equity, leadership and power.

Table 1: Gender Composition of Jamaican Trade Unions 2008

Name of Union	No. of Executive Members	Male	Female
BITU	9	7	2
JALGO	8	7	1
JCSA	6	4	2
JTA	15	9	6
JUPOPE	6	4	2
JWU	5	3	2
NAJ	25	1	24
NWU	18	15	3
UAWU	9	5	4
USAAW	8	4	4
UTASP	15	10	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>55</b>
Without NAJ	99	68	31

An assessment of the gender composition of the executive of all 11 Jamaican trade unions included in the study reveals that males accounted for 56% of all executive members, while females made up 44% of the total membership. The data also reveals that males dominated the executive core in all the trade unions except for the Nurses Association of Jamaica (NAJ) which had males occupying only 1% of the executive. The limited involvement of men in the executive of the NAJ is synonymous to the composition of the nursing profession in Jamaica. The literature portrays male entry in the profession as a recent phenomenon because it is culturally considered to be the domain of women. Between 2006 and 2007 only seven males enrolled for nursing in comparison to 474 females (ESSJ 2008). However, if we omit the contribution of the NAJ to the study, the overall percentage for females would decline to 31%, while the data for males would increase to 69% in overall membership.

Table 2: Presidents and General Secretaries (2008)

Name of Union	President	General Secretary
BITU	M	M
JALGO	M	F
JCSA	M	M
JTA	M	M
JUPOPE	M	NA
JWU	M	F
NAJ	F	F
NWU	M	M
UAWU	M	F
USAAW	M	M
UTASP	M	M
	M = 10, F = 1	M = 6, F = 4

A close examination of the president and general secretary positions for the unions in the study reveals that 10 of the 11 (99%) presidents for all the trade unions involved in the research were male (Table 2). However, the gender gap appears less pronounced when we examined the position of the general secretary. The findings illustrate a large disparity between men and women at the presidential level. The data reveals that of the ten general secretary posts identified in the study, four were held by female trade unionists. A deeper examination into the gender distribution among

the nine unions with both president and general secretary posts (Table 2), revealed that males dominated both positions in six of the 11 trade unions included in the study. It is important to note that in some unions the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) can also be the General Secretary. Of the 11 unions examined in the study the General Secretary was the CEO for JALGO, TUC AND UAWU. Interestingly, the General Secretary for JALGO happens to be a female.

Women appear to be more visible as general secretaries when compared to their involvement at the level of president. The presence of a female general secretary is common in some union organizations because of two reasons: Firstly, within some trade unions the general secretary is regarded as a clerical position that involves administrative work that is culturally to be "women's work" within some union organizations. Secondly, unions such as the NAJ that are affiliated to occupational groupings within the labour force that has a high female composition are more likely to have women occupying the position of general secretary because of the strong female influence within this profession.

Table 3: Vice Presidents (2008)

Name of Union	Male	Female
BITU	3	0
JALGO	4	0
JCSA	1	2
JTA	NA	NA
JUPOPE	2	0
JWU	2	1
NAJ	1	2
NWU	3	1
UAWU	3	1
USAAW	1	1
UTASP	NA	NA
<b>Total: 28</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>

An examination of the post of vice president in the 11 unions examined shows that males occupied 71% of these positions, while females occupied 29%. It should be noted that the position of vice president did not apply for some unions in the study. In the case of the Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA) and the Union for Technical

Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (UTASP) the general secretary assumes the functions of the vice president. Males dominated the position in six of the nine unions included in the study with vice presidents. However, it was observed that females occupied most of the vice president positions in the case of the Jamaica Civil Service Association (JCSA) and the NAJ. USAAW had equal ratio of males to females at the level of vice president (Table 3).

While males dominated presidential posts in national trade unions, women have been able to gain some influence by securing key positions such as general secretaries and vice presidents. Historically, both posts had been intrinsic to the maintenance of male hegemony within trade unions. However, in recent years the position of vice president has become more inclusive resulting in higher levels of female participation. Despite this achievement, men still outnumber women within this category. Nonetheless, the data reveals that women have been able to have greater access to this position when compared to female representation in the posts of President and General Secretary.

In order to better understand gender patterns within the structure of trade union leadership an examination was conducted of the presidency over a ten-year period to identify trends that have persisted over time at the most senior level. By looking at the gender composition of the presidential posts for unions in the study we are able to move away from making general assumptions about the gender composition of trade union leadership to more precise conclusions about women's contribution to the development of the labour movement.

An examination of the gender composition of the presidential post in the 11 unions over a ten-year period reveals that males accounted for 88% of all presidential positions (Table 4). Of the eleven unions assessed for this period males had control of the presidency in nine of the unions involved in the study. The exceptions were the NAJ and the JTA. The strong female influence within the presidency of both unions is correlated to the gender composition of both the teaching and nursing professions. Women are more likely to be found as presidents of these organizations because of their visibility at the supervisory and managerial level within these professions. Also, the gender composition of these

Table 4: Gender Composition of Presidency

Union	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
BITU	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
JALGO	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
JCSA	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
JTA	M	M	F	F	M	F	M	M	M	M
JUPOPE	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
JWU	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
NAJ	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
NWU	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
UAWU	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
USAAW	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
UTASP	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
						<b>Total</b>	<b>M = 97</b>	<b>F = 13</b>		



unions tends to be mainly women especially within clerical capacities.

The presence of a glass ceiling within the institutional structure of Jamaican trade unions remains entrenched by two factors. Firstly, some trade unions are known for nepotism especially within the most senior positions of general secretary and president. Therefore, accession to presidency may not be determined only by performance but by familial relations. This custom has been a part of trade union culture since the establishment of early trade unions in Jamaica. Despite its hindrance to the principles of democracy, nepotism within the organizations exists to protect core practices within them relating to organizational mandate, political orientation and collective bargaining procedures.

Secondly, some trade unions do not have electoral machinery that selects presidents and other executives on a term basis. This practice perpetuates discrimination against women because it curtails the ability of members within the organization to contest elections for the position of president in a democratic manner. Interestingly, the study reveals that from 2002 to 2007 the union movement experienced a decline in the number of women acquiring presidential status despite the heightened influence of international lobby groups focusing on equity and empowerment for women in the workplace.

## CONCLUSION

There were several limitations that hindered the data collection process for the study. As such, the research is limited to a particular period based on the availability of data and the willingness of unions to divulge information pertaining to the structure and leadership of their organization. Initially, the authors intended to assess the gender composition throughout all levels of union organization under the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions over the last 20 years. However, insufficient data exists among participating unions illustrating the gender distribution of men and women within administrative, clerical and leadership categories for this timeframe. As such, the data retrieved for the study seeks to enrich or clarify existing literature on national trade unions by providing statistical evidence once absent from previous discourses exploring the gender structure of trade unions in Jamaica.

Examining gender within Jamaican trade unions not only allows us to understand patterns of interaction within these organizations but also expands our knowledge of the institutionalized practices that foster discrimination between the sexes. Based on the evidence provided, it is apparent that women's exclusion from trade union leadership is a trans-generational practice that has generated greater opportunities for men. The data also reveals that women have made in-roads and are now at the helm of some unions within the capacity of general secretary and vice presidents. However, the 'glass ceiling' appears to be more pronounced at the presidential level. Within this category male participation in the post is almost eight times more than females within the ten year period.

This situation exists in contradiction to efforts by global unions to heighten the involvement of women within trade union leadership. In the UK and parts of Europe steps have been taken to redress this imbalance by establishing measures to ensure the compulsory involvement of women within the executive of union organizations. In the UK especially, trade unions tend to ensure the involvement of women by using proportionality or reserved seats. By adopting this approach women are provided with more equitable leadership opportunities. Unfortunately, the situation for women in Jamaican trade unions has not improved significantly in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean because of an absence in initiatives geared towards recruiting, mentoring and motivating women.

Like most other patriarchal organizations, equity and equality within Jamaican trade unions are circumvented by entrenched notions of power and leadership. In summation, the dominance of men within these organizations occurs for three reasons. Firstly, union members tend to prefer males at the helm of the trade union because of cultural notions regarding leadership. As such, women who qualify and make themselves available for leadership within these organizations may receive little support not only from men but also female members (see Phillips 2005). Secondly, while most Jamaican trade unions have democratic elections, a few practice nepotism based on familial bonds. Therefore, leadership especially at the presidential level within some unions is transferred from one generation to the next—ideally from father to son. This practice has

restrained the democratic process within union organizations and has stifled leadership opportunities for women.

As such, the persistence of hegemonic masculinity within the leadership of these organizations has compromised prospects for equity and equality – concepts foremost to economic development and human progress. An examination of the literature reveals that women have always contributed significantly to the development of modern trade unions; however the preoccupation with equity and equality for women within the labour movement was never a priority during the initial stages of union establishment. Recent concerns to facilitate women in trade union leadership has been made possible through initiatives undertaken by various groups inside and outside the academy seeking to address challenges specific to women in the labour movement.

If women are to share the reins of power an entire paradigm shift must be undertaken to reshape the present ideological infrastructure of the movement. The experience of women in the trade union movement is similar to that of those in traditional male dominated organizations, especially in respect to the distribution of power at the most senior levels of leadership. However, the fact that women are marginalized within the decision-making process of these organizations may have underlying implications for those who depend on trade union organizations for advice, representation and collective support. For women to enjoy empowerment within the corridors of power in the movement, inequality must be replaced by collective sentiments of respect and self worth.

## ADDENDUM

BITU – Bustamante Industrial Trade Union

JALGO – Jamaica Association of Local Government Officers

JCSA – Jamaica Civil Service Association

JTA – Jamaica Teachers' Association

JUPOPE – Jamaica Union of Public Officers and Public Employers

JWU – Jamaica Workers' Union

NAJ – Nurses Association of Jamaica

NWU – National Workers' Union

UAWU – University & Allied Workers' Union

USAAW – Union of Schools, Agricultural and Associated Workers

UTASP – Union of Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Personnel

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