

**STATEMENT TO THE WSSD GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR CAPACITY
BUILDING TO IMPLEMENT THE GLOBALLY HARMONIZED SYSTEM FOR
CHEMICAL CLASSIFICATION AND LABELLING (GHS)**

By
Conchita Poncini
International Federation of University Women

I am speaking on behalf of the International Federation of University Women and as president of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva. I would like first of all to thank the organizers – UNITAR, ILO and OECD, for giving me this opportunity to participate in this GHS partnership initiative.

Chemical classification and labelling systems are primarily for consumers using chemicals to warn against the dangers and their effects to safety and health. These consumers are obviously divided into two categories: those who are themselves using chemical products to produce other products and those who are ultimate consumers. The latter will be the focus of this brief statement.

Household products are the largest manufactured products with chemical contents. And in terms of the number of users, the largest population are women who are the primary custodians and of the household and care of the family notably children. Yet, so far, this population is sadly neglected in policy-making and practices because of the absence of systematic gender perspective and the disaggregation of data by sex.

In the area of capacity building and training, one size does not fit all. By this I mean that labelling and data sheets have cultural and social underpinnings. For example, images, colours and shapes have symbols which could have specific meanings depending on the country where this is located. Furthermore, such capacity building should be user friendly, i.e. comprehensible and practical which can be understood by the least common denominator who are illiterate and can understand only signs and a local language.

Women are often ignored in the harmonization process – the secondary effects of chemicals to their health and safety at informal work such as agriculture and other services using beauty or utility products at home. Since these are used in the private sphere, many of the negative effects are not recorded except when serious accidents occur where victims are taken to hospitals, which becomes public and then and only then catch the attention of government and other decision-makers and producers. Women are also the poorest of the poor and consequently have no resources. They are obliged to have recourse to utilizing second hand products or products that have become out of date, e.g. food products, medicines, cleaning products, pesticides, etc.

When considering methods and systems for capacity building, such factors as language and educational level as well as accessibility to ICTs have to systematically include gender awareness and sensitivity training and factor in affordability to users and social responsibility of producers.

With regards to transparency and participation, I congratulate Mr. Hildman of the Argentine delegation who emphasized the need to be holistic and should include all chemical subjects such as drugs, new chemical weapons and other pharmaceutical products in order to have a big picture and avoid double standards for developed and developing countries. Consideration should also be taken of conflict of interests and contradictory international standards.

Finally, in the partnership initiative, IFUW could be a valuable partner in that we have a multi-disciplinary membership worldwide of 180 individual members in 72 countries and who could act as mentors, advisers or participate in surveys and other forms of research. The NGO Committee on the Status of Women could also be a valid partner to mobilize our national affiliates, if given the necessary resources.

Thank you once again and sharing in your experiences of country projects which I found very valuable and useful.
