GENDER ISSUES IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Briefing kit

PART 3

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Gender Training for ILO Staff and Constituents
for the Promotion of Equality for Women Workers

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PART 3

Current issues for women workers in the regions

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The changing role of women in the economy - Employment and social issues[1]

Introduction

In the last comprehensive ILO review of women almost a decade ago, the emphasis was on their unequal participation relative to men in the labour force. The report submitted to the 71st Session of the International Labour Conference prompted the adoption of the Resolution (in 1985) and the Plan of Action (in 1987) on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women in Employment. The ILO's concern with gender discrimination was based on equity and social justice considerations. Women were viewed as in need of "special" measures - mainly in terms of standards setting and the promotion of anti-discrimination legislation and equal opportunity measures - to enable them to achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment on an equal footing with men, and to protect them in their distinctive role as childbearers and childminders. A Resolution concerning ILO Action for Women Workers adopted by the 78th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1991 reaffirmed the need for concerted tripartite action on comprehensive strategies to enhance the economic and social role of women and to deal with persistent discrimination on the basis of sex. A document reviewing ILO action on discrimination in employment and occupation is before the Committee on Legal Issues and International Labour Standards.[2]

The purpose of the current report is to review the changing role of women in the economy and to highlight, within an ILO framework, their implications for further ILO action and for the role of the constituents in relation to the four major related objectives of:[3]

— *efficiency*, meaning that there should be maximum returns on both male and female human resources, maximum output and maximum income;
— *growth*, meaning that women's participation should contribute as fully as possible to higher productivity and incomes, poverty alleviation and improved employment in the future;

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[1] The text of this briefing note is the Governing Body paper GB.261/ESP/2/2 for the 261st Session of the Governing Body, Committee on Employment and Social Policy, of the International Labour Office, Geneva, November 1994.

[2] See GB.261/LILS/7/5.

[3] As set out in the paper prepared for the ILO Governing Body Committee on Employment and Social Policy on Active Labour Market Policies in a Wider Policy Context (GB.258/ESP/2/5). November 1993, ILO. Geneva.

— *equity*, meaning equality of opportunity for men and women in access to jobs and training, equal treatment at work and equal pay for work of equal value; and
— *social justice*, meaning that since labour market participation may have positive or negative effects on women's welfare, just as they may have on men's welfare, society should act to minimize negative results, redress the harm done and provide special assistance to the most vulnerable and needy.

The report makes the case that, on the one hand, women are not just victims of discrimination but economic actors and agents of change; and, on the other hand, the elimination of discrimination as a matter of social justice need not conflict with and could, in fact, reinforce or contribute to economic efficiency and growth. Over the past decade, there has been such an unprecedented increase in the labour force participation and employment of women that their economic role is now central to the mainstream concerns of the ILO and its constituents for productive employment promotion and poverty alleviation.

The changing role of women in the economy[4]

The feminization of the labour force and of employment

A dramatic change since 1985 in both industrialized and developing countries has been the feminization of the labour force and of employment. The secular trend has been *rising female labour force participation, at the same time as economic activity rates for men have been falling*. In most parts of the world, women are no longer the "reserve" labour or "secondary workers"; they are fully committed workers who stay in the labour force in one work status or another. Feminization has involved female attachment to employment; women are no longer housewives first and workers second. They have reduced their time out of the labour force for reproductive functions and increasingly remain economically active throughout their working lives. A concomitant phenomenon has been the increasing autonomous internal and international migration of women for work.

In the *OECD area*, there were 169.4 million women in the labour force in 1992, some 33 million more than in 1980. Economic participation by women grew by 2 per cent per annum, twice the pace of their male counterparts, whose numbers have been falling.[5] Some of the

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[4] This section draws from the ILO Contribution to the 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, Productive Employment: Women Workers in a Changing Global Environment, August 1994; the framework paper on Women Workers in a Changing Global Environment prepared by the ILO's International Institute for Labour Studies and other papers for the ILO's International Forum on Equality for Women in the World of Work, June 1994; the Contribution of the ILO to the First Substantive Session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development Supplementary Information; the draft paper by ECE/ILO on Women in a Changing World: Employment and Earnings; the ILO Yearbooks of Labour Statistics; and reports from the ILO Interdepartmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment.

[5] Women and the Restructuring of Employment by Francoise Core, OECD Observer, February/March 1994.

most spectacular increases in female labour force participation occurred in those countries, such as the Netherlands and Spain, which entered the 1980s with relatively few women in the labour force. In the United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, women now comprise close to half the labour force. Another striking feature has been that female employment has grown faster than the growth of the female labour force.

In *East and Central Europe*, female labour force attachment has remained strong in the process of transition to a market economy. Even with the recession, the labour force participation of women, especially of those between the ages 20-49 years, has not declined more than that of men. The somewhat fragmentary data available for the Russian Federation, the Ukraine and Belarus indicate that the share of women in the number of wage and salary earners has not declined in the early 1990s. The Labour Force Surveys conducted by the ILO in Russia have established that in the first phase of employment restructuring, women's share of employment in industry actually increased because they tended to hold on to their state sector jobs more than men. In the transition economies in Asia, available information shows rising female participation. In the *People's Republic of China*, for instance, the proportion of economically active among the total female population rose from 49 per cent in 1980 to 54 per cent in 1990.

In the *developing countries*, conceptual and methodological constraints and conventional labour force definitions and statistical systems still do not appropriately or adequately reflect women's productive work in the non-market economy, as producers in subsistence agriculture and in the urban and rural informal sector. ILO methodological studies found that with improved labour force questionnaires including a wider definition of "economic activity" to cover informal sector and non-market activities, measured female labour force activity rates rose from 13 per cent to 88 per cent in India, and from 11 per cent to 63 per cent in Bangladesh. Although much of the work done by women continues to be invisible, official statistics confirm that the female share of the labour force has been rising. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of women in the labour force rose from 24 to 29 per cent between 1970 to 1990. In East and South-East Asia, women provide up to 80 per cent of the workforce in the export processing zones. In Africa, official data show declining female economic activity rates since the 1970s for countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zaire; but unofficial research data indicate very high participation rates for women who account for most of the food producers and those in petty trading.

The feminization of international labour migration

A distinctive feature of recent Asian labour markets has been the internationalization beyond national boundaries and the entry (both legal and illegal) of women into these markets as contract labour. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was the men who migrated. But with the slow down in development construction in the Middle East, it is now Asian women who have gone to the labour markets in the Middle East, Western Europe to some extent, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia, mainly as housemaids, entertainers (including

prostitutes), nurses and helpers in retail shops and restaurants. Filipina female migrant workers outnumber their male counterparts by 12 to 1 in Asian destinations; there are more than 3 female Indonesian migrants for every male migrant; and about 3 Sri Lankan female migrant workers to every 2 male counterparts. Thai migrant flows have also become increasingly feminized. But cultural constraints restrict female outflows from the other South Asian countries.

The feminization of poverty

The increasing share of women in the labour force has to be seen in relation to what has been happening in the world over the past decade. Except for a small group of countries in East and South East Asia,[6] economic growth has been declining, stagnant or even negative; more people are out of work than ever before; and poverty and income inequalities have been rising. The Asian Development Bank estimated that out of one billion poor people in the developing world, about 800 million live in Asia. Among these, some 500 million are considered to be in extreme absolute poverty. In Africa, whole regions, notably most of Sub-Saharan Africa, have suffered systematic impoverishment. Even in the developed countries, there has been growing deprivation and the emergence of new poor groups as increasing numbers fail to gain access to the economic mainstream and are marginalized. The gap between rich and poor has widened within and across countries.

While figures are hard to come by, it is almost certain that *a significantly higher percentage of women* are poor than of men. Available information on female-headed households and estimates of rural poverty by sex suggest that women's share of poverty in developing countries has grown more than men's share of poverty. While both men and women have suffered rising unemployment and falling real wages, women have additional non-labour market burdens. Various ILO studies[7] have shown that the feminization of poverty is closely linked to the substantial increase in households headed by women in both developing and developed countries, and also to the feminization of work at home and in the market. In the transition economies, the withdrawal of free or heavily subsidized social services, especially for health, education and childcare, has tended to have harsher effects on women than on men because of their heavier reliance on such services to enable them to combine jobs and motherhood.

The feminization of unemployment

Overall, more men than women are openly unemployed because of their larger numbers in the labour force. But *women's unemployment rates tend to be higher than those of men.* In

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[6] And the more recent economic success story of the Mauritius which has been experiencing high growth.

[7] See the studies for the Symposium on Poverty: New Approaches to Analysis and Policy organized by the International Institute for Labour Studies, 22-24 November 1993, Geneva, ILO.

the majority of *OECD countries*, women's unemployment rates exceed those of men. The 1992 recorded unemployment rate for women in Europe was 11.5 per cent, as compared to the overall rate of 9.9 per cent. In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland, unemployment rates are higher for women, especially young women, than for men.

In the *East and Central European countries* in transition, women have been more adversely affected than men by the mass unemployment since the late 1980s. It is only Hungary, Slovenia and lately Slovakia that have a higher unemployment rate for men than for women. In the Russian Federation and the other CIS countries, the share of women among the unemployed has reached a particularly high level, variously estimated at 70-80 per cent. Women have been particularly affected by the substantial lay-offs in light manufacturing industries and severe cuts in administrative jobs in large industrial enterprises. In addition, women experience greater difficulties than men in being re-employed, and with the exception of those in the Czech Republic, are therefore more prone to long-term unemployment than men.

In *Africa*, the rates of open unemployment for females are often double those for men and have been rising in recent years. In urban Kenya in 1991, 24.1 per cent of women but only 11.7 per cent of men were unemployed. In South Africa, the female unemployment rate in 1991 was 9.3 per cent, up from 8.5 per cent in 1985; whereas the male unemployment rate was 8.0 per cent in 1991 and 7.9 per cent in 1985. In North Africa and the Middle East, excluding the Gulf countries, recent unemployment rates are generally in the double digit figures; particularly among young secondary school leavers and particularly among those who are female. In Egypt, for instance, the female rate of unemployment in 1991 was 27.8 per cent as compared to only 6.3 per cent for males.

In the *Caribbean* (Bahamas, Jamaica) and some *Latin American countries* (Panama and Nicaragua), the gender differentials are particularly large in the context of high absolute levels of unemployment. In Sao Paolo, for instance 31 per cent of the economically active women were unemployed as compared to 11 per cent of the men; and the mean period of unemployment was much longer for women (11.2 months as compared to 8 months for men). Underemployment, especially measured in terms of income earned relative to hours worked, is an almost exclusively female phenomenon. The "added worker" effect (more poor women entering the labour force to compensate for male unemployment or to make up for falling real household incomes) has been documented for Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay in the 1980s.

In the *Asian and Pacific region*, open unemployment rates for the mid-1980s to early 1990s have been higher for women than for men in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. In Pakistan, for instance, 1990/91 unemployment was 13.8 per cent for females and 3.9 per cent for males in rural areas and at 27.8 per cent for females and 5.9 per cent for males in urban areas. In Sri Lanka, the 1992 unemployment rate

was 21.0 per cent for females and 10.6 per cent for males. In Indonesia, unemployment increases with educational level for both sexes but the rate for women with senior high school education and above is almost twice as high as for their male counterparts. Only in the labour-short economies of Hong Kong, Singapore and the Republic of Korea have female unemployment rates been lower than male rates.

The feminization of atypical and/or precarious employment

Over the past decade, both industrialized and developing countries adopted economic reform and structural adjustment programmes to improve economic efficiency by permitting a relatively rapid and more cost-effective adjustment to the peaks and troughs of production, and to loosen the legally and administratively established frameworks of rules and collective agreements which are thought to constrain labour mobility and the responsiveness of wages to market conditions. What has resulted is the limited creation of stable, full-time, wage employment. The bulk of new jobs has tended to be in atypical, often precarious, forms of work. Women have been going into small and medium size enterprises in the informal sector and taking up *part-time or temporary jobs, homeworking, teleworking, subcontracting or putting out systems, and self-employment*. Some women choose such work for the flexible hours, which are convenient for those with family responsibilities, and for the ease of entry into some of the economic activities undertaken. But for growing numbers, part-time or temporary employment and informal sector work is involuntary. *Informalization or casualization of labour relationships* has also meant that a distancing of both the state and the enterprise from their social responsibilities to workers.

In the *OECD countries*, part-time work has generally increased even faster than the overall employment for women. In 1991/92, 62 per cent of all women workers were employed part-time in the Netherlands, and over 40 per cent in Australia, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In Spain, some 38 per cent of all women workers are temporary, as compared to 29 per cent of employed males. The proportion of women among the homeworkers range from 90-95 per cent in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, to 84 per cent in France, 75 per cent in Spain and 70 per cent in the United Kingdom.

In *Africa*, although there are numerically less women than men in the informal sector, a greater proportion of the female than male labour force tends to be concentrated in small-scale, under-capitalized, low-productivity market trade and personal service activities. In West Africa, women constitute between 60 and 80 per cent of the urban labour force in trading and dominate the open market and petty trading. In sub-Saharan Africa, some women leave occupations such as teaching and nursing to engage in potentially more lucrative informal sector activities, which could lead to a gradual erosion of the professional skills base. More commonly, though, women, like men, maintain their foothold in the public sector but engage simultaneously in informal sector activities. Those in rural areas combine informal work with farming and use their children to help out. Since 1985, women have faced increased competition from men who have been entering the informal sector in greater numbers,

especially in trading.

In *Latin America*, older married women and especially female heads of households are more likely to be in the informal sector than younger women, whereas age and marital status tend to be negatively associated with the informal sector participation of men. In Ecuador, female participation in the informal sector rose from 40 per cent in 1978 to 52 per cent in 1988. In Jamaica, female self-employment rose by 25 per cent as compared to 15 per cent in male self-employment between 1980-87. In the Dominican Republic too, the share of the economically active population, both male and female, in the informal sector has been growing, with 70 per cent of the women in the sector are earning incomes below the poverty line. In Mexico, 77 of every 100 workers in the *maquiladora* industry were female in 1981; in 1992 the ratio was only 59 of every 100 workers. On the other hand, there has been a rise in the number of small units in trading, manufacturing and service activities and a growing incidence of part-time employment especially among women.

In *Asia*, women commonly dominate in hawking and trading activities. More recently, there has been an increase in their involvement in micro or small scale production activities and home-based activities, as self-employed or piece rate workers. ILO labour flexibility surveys in the Philippines and Malaysia have shown that the greater the degree of labour casualization, the higher the proportion of total employment consisting of women and the more vulnerable these women are to exploitative conditions. In Pakistan, women displaced from large-scale manufacturing have been pushed increasingly into informal sector subcontracting especially in garments, unpaid family work and very poorly paid domestic service. In Indonesia, more than a fifth of all women in the workforce are in trading although this is the least lucrative of the self-employment activities.

Feminization and technological developments

A veritable *technological revolution* in microelectronics, computer science, telecommunications, transportation, biotechnology and materials science over the past two decades has had *both negative and positive effects on women's employment*. Their employment opportunities have increased where technology has helped create a network of small and medium-sized subcontractors and outsource workers in areas that range from printing and publishing, through garments and footwear, to automobile parts and microelectronic chips in industry within and across countries. Telework, electronic homework, offshore data processing and office administrative services are other new employment opportunities. On the other hand, automation and advances in robotics have made the threat of technological unemployment in some sectors a very real one for women, although probably less than for men. The trend has also been away from least skilled jobs where women tend to be concentrated towards technical, professional and managerial employment where women are less likely to be found. Some traditionally "feminine" occupations, such as secretarial work, are becoming obsolete. With modern technology, today's production system is based on *the existence of a core group of highly skilled, comprehensively trained and polyvalent (normally male) workers and an*

increasing periphery comprising temporary and casual (normally female) workers, outworkers and subcontractors who together function as a labour reserve.

For the majority of Third World women who still live in *rural areas*, the introduction of high-yielding grain and crop varieties generated employment, both through increasing the cultivated acreage and land productivity and also the number of incremental tasks traditionally carried out by female agricultural workers. But the subsequent introduction of fertilizers and pesticides and of mechanization displaced or reduced women's participation in the actual production process and especially in post-harvest processing. New techniques in agriculture, particularly when they involve commercialization, often shift economic control, employment and profit from women to men. When a new technique makes a new crop more profitable, men move in to take over from women. In addition, women, because of their lack of access to or control over land and credit, are rarely able to access and make use of the mechanical and other innovations that are effecting the technology-led agrarian transformation. They are also neglected by agricultural extension services who direct information to men as the "farmer" and they do not receive technology related training. For much the same reasons and because women are not consulted about their needs and priorities, they are not enjoying the benefits of the many "appropriate" technologies now available to ease their heavy daily chores.

Feminization and globalization

The recent technological innovations have strengthened *internationalization or globalization* of the world economy, with a new international division of labour. The quantum, quality and distribution of jobs worldwide among and within countries and by gender and skills have been affected. Women benefitted from the earlier round of off-shore manufacturing, especially in countries such as Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. But from the mid-1980s, there have been important shifts in opportunities for female wage employment in manufacturing as foreign investors have moved increasingly to countries such as Indonesia, China, Bangladesh, India and Vietnam in search of more readily available and cheaper labour and often less stringent enforcement of labour legislation. However, both groups of countries are increasingly recognizing that their longer term competitive position will depend not on cheap female physical labour but on skilled human resources, male and female, to complement the rapid advances in technology.

Feminization and the market economy

With the growing dominance of the market and the declining role of the state in the economy, *women have tended to be more adversely affected than men because they previously relied on a number of protective measures and an array of social services to enable them to combine jobs with motherhood.* Privatization and downscaling of the size of the public sector affect women, both as consumers and workers. As consumers and given their reproductive role, women have been affected by the cutbacks in previously subsidized services such as education and health care. As the "caregiving" members of communities, more women are working to

pay for these previously subsidized services or they are placing greater demands on their own time to provide these services themselves. Women workers have been adversely affected by the retrenchments not only because the government has been a major employer but also because wages and employment conditions are better on average in the public sector and there tends to be less gender discrimination. The transition countries also appear to have put aside their previous commitment to equality for women in employment.

With the growing individualization of economic relationships and the proliferation of atypical forms of work, traditional trade union activities have become harder to expand or sustain. Yet women workers are more in need than ever of group mobilization and organization to empower them to deal with the abandonment of traditional institutional support structures and with the evolution of new forms of institutionalized control. In the formal sector, there has been a significant increase in women's numbers in trade unions during the past decade, but the increase varies between regions, countries and industrial sectors, and women's membership still lags behind their numbers in the workforce, and certainly behind men's representation. Some unions have adopted strategies to enhance women's representation in the unions in general and at the leadership level in particular, but few women are currently found in union leadership. And in difficult economic times, collective bargaining has tended to focus on bread and butter issues than what are seen to be "feminine" concerns. Various efforts have been made at the national level to organize female domestic workers (including migrants), homeworkers, rural women workers, the self employed and informal sector women[8], but clearly the challenge of *organizing the unorganized women workers* remains a formidable one.

The implications of feminization

The increasing numbers of women in employment and unemployment and the changing structure of their employment have important implications for the goals of the ILO and its constituents. For the sake of clarity, the major implications are discussed below separately for efficiency and growth, and equity and social justice. But from the outset, it should be stressed that these objectives are themselves not separate or distinct. Economic efficiency and growth go together, while equity is one dimension of social justice and a component of efficiency and growth.

The efficiency and growth considerations

The basic theme of this paper is that women's labour force participation and productive employment hold the key to economic efficiency and growth at enterprise, national and international levels and to higher incomes and welfare at the household level. All too often, the focus has been only on women as victims of the recent global changes. There are even

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[8] See the volume from the ILO's Interdepartmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment on Women and Trade Unions: Organizing the Unorganized, Geneva: 1994.

suggestions that it is women's entry into the labour force that is contributing to the current unemployment crisis. What is more important to emphasize is that women have been *economic actors and agents of change, responding to the emerging opportunities and threats and influencing the pace and nature of the changes*. At the household level, it has been the "*added worker*" effect of women's entry into the labour force that has enabled the majority of poor households to cope with falling real incomes in the global economic crisis. Diverse studies have shown that it has been the flexible allocation of women's time that has been an integral aspect of the adjustment to rising poverty; women have increased their time allocated to productive and community activities, often at the expense of household work, family care and their own leisure time. They have seized employment opportunities or they have innovatively "created" income earning opportunities in self-employment, home-based production or work in the informal sector. They have accepted insecure part-time work, periods of no work followed by intense periods of working night and day to help make ends meet for their families. While men's roles have tended to remain resistant to change and while they are more likely to prefer to remain unemployed and search for other wage employment, women, especially female heads of households, have taken up any work available. Their entry into international labour markets is, in fact, one of the most striking responses to the deterioration of domestic labour market opportunities and represents a family survival strategy.

It is also this *"flexibility" associated with the use of female time and efforts*, together with the persisting perception of women as "labour reserve", that has provided the basis for labour market flexibilization and made it possible for both labour markets and enterprises to make relatively rapid and more cost-effective adjustments to the peaks and troughs of production. Their presence at the periphery makes it easier for employers to recruit on a contingent basis, thus facilitating a highly flexible workforce and enabling a reduction of fixed labour costs. Where international competitive conditions opened up employment opportunities, such as in manufacturing in the export-processing zones, it was women who supplied a ready and seemingly endless supply of cheap labour. They have been the cornerstone of labour-intensive industrialization and the main attraction for foreign investors because of the low remuneration associated with their employment, together with their perceived "feminine" characteristics, such as greater docility relative to male workers, their manual dexterity, and deference to command. Where international contract labour markets have opened up and especially where the demand for male guest workers for development construction has slowed down, it has been women who have given up hearth and family for work overseas. Many Asian countries have come to rely increasingly on the "comparative advantage of women's disadvantages". On the other hand, where efficiency reorganization measures have entailed retrenchments and job losses, women have been the first to lose heir jobs.

For women to contribute effectively to the goals of efficiency and growth, they must have *access to and control over resources* in terms of:

— knowledge (so that the potentials of female human resources can be fully developed);
— time (an overworked worker with the double burdens of home and the workplace

cannot be a productive worker);

— health and reproductive choice (especially in less developed countries, high fertility is still a major barrier to women's effective participation in the labour force);

— more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women and childcare and other support facilities (so as to reduce the conflict between women's productive and reproductive roles);

— physical assets (women's limited access to or control over land restricts their access to other resources, such as credit or technology. Lack of the means of transportation also hampers women from bringing their goods to the market);

— financial assets (whether the informal sector is a sector of last resort or a potentially economically viable and productive sector is often dependent on women's access to adequate credit on reasonable terms); and

— markets (both in terms of being able to identify and capture emerging opportunities and in terms of being able to sell finished products nationally and internationally).

The equity and social justice considerations

For many women, *their new and enlarged role and the contributions they make to economic efficiency and growth have been at increasing costs to themselves, and often to their children too*. The recent economic reforms and structural adjustment have increased the vulnerability of women to the negative impacts of the market, to poor and often deteriorating working conditions, to unstable or insecure earnings, and to the lack of social protection. Of course, this is not to imply that men have not suffered at all. On the contrary, *many of the observations on the impact of adjustment apply also to men. But women tend to be more adversely affected* and there is disturbing evidence that gender discrimination has tended to increase as the job situation has worsened and as profit motivations have strengthened. *The feminization of employment has not been synonymous with improvement in the quality of employment*. Labour flexibility surveys conducted by the ILO have shown that the greater the degree to which industries adopt flexible practices/technologies, the higher the proportion of total employment consisting of women who are normally relegated to the industrial periphery. Peripheral workers are supposed to be "dispensable" workers, their dismissal is easier and less expensive to employers. The atypical forms of employment are notoriously precarious, are associated with low earning capacity and lack of training opportunities or promotion prospects, and often do not offer non-wage benefits. *More and more women are not covered by standard labour legislation and are not entitled to social guarantees by the state or formal employment institutions covering minimal terms and conditions of work and social security coverage*. Even when legal provisions are available, women workers are not likely to press for them because of the insecure nature of their employment and because of the increased pressure to hold on to their jobs in these difficult economic times. For those who are self-employed in the informal sector, the problems relate not only to very limited access to credit, skills, technology, organized markets and community support structures. They are less likely than men to know how to deal with bureaucratic structures for licences, market places, bank loans, etc. Those in subcontracting tend to be at the bottom end of the subcontracting chain,

where returns to their hard physical efforts and long hours are hived off by others higher up the chain.

The trade-off between women's productive and reproductive roles has intensified, leading to a squeeze on their time and energy, so that women bear *the "hidden costs" of adjustment.* Women have suffered a "pincers" effect as on the one side they have been pushed into the labour force often on highly disadvantaged terms to compensate for falling real incomes, while on the other side, the burden of household and unpaid work increases under the pressure to reduce expenditures and as social support for health and education is eroded by cutbacks in public expenditure programmes. In Ecuador and Nepal, for instance, women work longer hours than a decade ago in order to maintain the same incomes. The welfare of other household members and longer-term human capital investment could also be affected as older daughters are withdrawn from school to help out with reproductive tasks, or teenagers become secondary workers instead of attending school.

The report on *home work* to be presented to the 82nd Session (1995) of the International Labour Conference identifies the very low levels of remuneration as the most crucial single issue facing homeworkers. Their wages are almost universally based on the piece rate system which tends to lead to excessively long working hours, the employment of a concealed army of unpaid "assistants" and child labour. As part of the "putting out" system, women homeworkers, especially those in rural areas, are outside the scope of existing social security schemes, and are cut off from the enterprise by a network of agents, contractors, subcontractors, middlemen and intermediaries. They work as and when orders come in, are forced out of work when there is none and normally accept rates of pay that are well below the going rates for unskilled labour. Even where the piece rates for homeworkers and in-workers are supposed by law to be the same, homeworkers may end up earning less than their factory counterparts because they may in practice be given more difficult work to do. Data for the Philippines and Thailand show that levels of remuneration have actually declined or have been eroded.

The *female international labour migrants*, especially those who do not enter a country through legal channels and who go mainly into domestic service and the entertainment/sex industry overseas, are even more vulnerable to exploitative conditions than other groups of women and certainly more than male migrants. Due to their relative lack of education and access to information, women are more likely than men to be duped by unscrupulous agents who charge them exorbitant intermediation fees, arrange jobs that turn out to be in prostitution or that involve very long and hard hours of domestic work, and promise wages that are not paid. A major reason why female migrant workers tend to be more vulnerable than men is that they go into individualized situations (as domestics in households) where there is greater isolation and lower likelihood of establishing networks of information and social support, compared to men who commonly work in groups on construction sites. Social problems relate to the disruption of family life, delinquency of children without mothers at home, etc. A number of case studies in the United States, Canada and Western Europe show that women who

accompanied male immigrants as their dependents and who are often not accorded the right to work have gone into homework or the informal sector where their lower wages, poorer working conditions and lack of legislative and social protection are compounded by the added vulnerability of illegal work status.

Equity and social justice are related not just to economic deprivation but also to social processes of exclusion. The ILO's recent work on social exclusion[9] has drawn attention to the crucial point that *gender continues to be a significant basis of exclusion from rights or livelihood.* Exclusion from livelihood takes many forms - exclusion from land, other productive assets or markets for goods, labour market exclusions including unemployment, and exclusion from secure jobs, social protection or opportunities for human resource development. The exclusions from income and welfare are closely linked to exclusion from human rights, participation and decision making. These exclusions are likely to coincide when they are due to gender discrimination, and their negative impacts are reinforced when macro-economic development strategies are gender blind. Even when women are not excluded from public goods and services and not poor, they may be excluded from labour markets and from effective representation in decision-making bodies. Or, as in structural adjustment contexts, women have been included in labour markets but excluded from secure jobs, social protection and representation. Women in agriculture are particularly affected by the exclusion from land; even when they have derivative access, they do not have control over the use of land. This exclusion often leads to exclusion from institutionalized credit.

Persistent inequalities

Within the general framework of the Convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111), it is clear that there are still many areas of persistent discrimination on the basis of gender. Firstly, in both developing and developed economies, *gender segregation by occupation* remains strong[10] and represents a major labour market rigidity and source of labour market inequalities. Data for some 500 non-agricultural occupations in the United States, United Kingdom and France indicate that approximately 45 per cent of the labour force is in gender dominated occupations where either women or men make up at least 80 per cent of the occupation. Even in the United States where indeed women have broken into male dominated areas, the evidence is that they are still segregated into the lower status areas of the professions. Though there has been a perceptible upward trend in the representation of women in managerial and administrative categories and in the professional and technical categories relative to their share in total employment, few women have reached the highest ranks of decision-making.

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[9] Which will be an ILO input to the World Summit on Social Development in 1995.

[10] Data on occupational distribution by sex in both the developed and developing world is available from the unique database, called SEGREGAT, set up by the Interdepartmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment.

Secondly, *different values and remuneration continue to be attached to men's and women's jobs*. Most female-dominated occupations are characterized by low status, poor remuneration and limited potential for skills acquisition, promotion or training. New generations of women are increasingly well educated and have continuous labour force attachment, yet many are still employed in "unskilled" occupations (such as sales or personal services) or in skilled "female" occupations where there are limited career prospects (such as nursing) or in the lower levels of "mixed" occupations. Where there has been desegregation of male dominated industries or occupations, it is often associated with the decline in attractiveness of those job slots.

Thirdly, *wage differentials* still represent one of the most persistent forms of discrimination between women and men, although the Convention on Equal Remuneration, 1951 (No. 100) has one of the highest ratification rates of all ILO standards. The incomes women receive undervalue their contribution to the economy. In much of the industrialized world, women receive 70-80 per cent of the hourly pay rates of men. In Japan and the Republic of Korea, women receive about half as much as men. In Western European and North American countries, there is very little evidence to suggest that traditional female job areas have been re-evaluated and paid at higher levels. On the other hand, some developing countries are considering doing away with their minimum wage policies on the grounds that such policies restrict labour market flexibility (although these tend to offer some protection for the weaker workers).

The continuing segregation of the labour market, the crowding of women into a narrow range of low-skilled, low-status occupations and atypical precarious employment arrangements and their lesser availability for overtime, night work and shift work because of family responsibilities and or legislative prohibitions contribute to the gap between the earnings of women and men. But there is still a residual difference in earnings which cannot be explained by job differences or productivity related characteristics, indicating various forms of *wage discrimination*. The difficulties of finding appropriate criteria to judge comparable worth[11] and to extend such criteria to the private sector, and especially to small enterprises, complicate the problem. Even where comparability is based on the value of job content, that is on skill, responsibility, physical and mental effort and the conditions under which work is performed, it is still open to subterfuge and evasion based on the implicit upgrading of certain criteria (such as physical effort) specific to males. Job evaluation criteria may still contain implicit sex stereotype assumptions which would serve to entrench discrimination.

Fourthly, *women continue to lag behind men in terms of education and training for entering and progressing in the labour market*. In many developing countries, girls have had greatly increased opportunities for general education and often outperform boys, but their occupational choice remains limited, mainly because of the lack of career orientation, as compared to boy's education which is more likely to be employment-oriented. Vocational and

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[11] See M. Gunderson. 1994. Comparable Worth and Gender Discrimination: An International Perspective. Geneva: ILO.

technical training in formal institutions often continues to be based on perceived "appropriate" skills for girls and to perpetuate gender discrimination. Little has been done to improve the human resource potentials of a whole generation of illiterate women still within economically active ages. Older women with no or limited basic education and few transferable skills tend to be most adversely affected by economic restructuring. Where women receive training from the enterprise, it is mainly only upon entry to enable them to perform the job they are assigned. But they are still discriminated against in terms of in-service training or retraining, mainly because they lack the seniority or qualifications compared to men, or they are in non-regular employment, or employers still perceive the returns to investment in training for women to be lower than for men. This affects their opportunities for skill upgrading, skill diversification or skill flexibility and their ability to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and production processes.

Efficiency, growth, equity and social justice from a gender perspective — Towards an ILO framework

The underlying theme of the report is that the objectives of efficiency, growth, equity and social justice would be much better served by recognizing and specifically taking into account the crucial role of women in production and reproduction. Of course, more than gender-sensitive policies and programmes are needed to achieve these objectives, especially in the current context of high unemployment and underemployment and rising poverty. Indeed, their attainment is the preoccupation of many of the activities of the ILO and its constituents. But an important starting point is to specifically recognize that *from a gender perspective, these objectives can complement and reinforce, rather than conflict with, each other and their overall achievement* can be enhanced through explicitly incorporating gender and social (including productive and quality employment and poverty alleviation) considerations in strategies for maximizing economic efficiency and output growth.

Such an integrated and holistic approach is the basis of ILO action. In line with its active partnership policy and the setting up of multidisciplinary teams in different regions of the world, the ILO now adopts a *"mainstreaming" strategy* to incorporate gender analysis in all its programme objectives and activities. The strategy is to take into consideration the specific roles, situation, needs and interests of women relative to those of men, in order to ensure that women can effectively participate in and benefit from those objectives and activities on an equal footing with men. Whenever necessary to avoid the marginalization of women, to redress previous imbalances between men's and women's rights and benefits, or to protect and support particularly vulnerable groups of women, the strategy includes *women-specific measures or affirmative action*. The approach stresses that addressing *women's practical needs*, such as improving their access to productive employment, income, training, credit, technology, etc. must go hand in hand with efforts to meet their *strategic needs* including more equal sharing of family responsibilities and greater participation in decision making.