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## **VULNERABILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN GENDERED LABOUR MARKETS: WOMEN WORKERS IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY AND CHALLENGES FOR TRADE UNIONS**

Rachel Kurian

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LABOUR MARKETS: WOMEN WORKERS IN A GLOBAL  
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations
APRO	Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EIRO	European Industrial Relations Observatory
GROOTS	Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HDR	Human Development Report
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Office
IWCC	International Women's Communications Centre
KILM	Key Indicators of the Labour Market
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PSI	Public Services International
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Organisations
UN	United Nations
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing
WISTAT	Women's Indicators and Statistics (Data Base)
WTO	World Trade Organisation





## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world there is increasing awareness of the role and the potential of women's contribution towards growth and development. At the same time, we see that problems of various sorts, ranging from forms of discrimination to problematic working conditions, continue to be the life experience of the majority of women workers. Many of these issues have a historical basis while some of them are of a more recent nature. This paper analyses key employment trends and concerns affecting women workers in the global economy, calling attention to possible areas of policy intervention on the part of trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

### BOX 1

#### *Important Trends and Characteristics of Women's Work*

- For the overwhelming majority of economies, the gap between male and female participation rates has been falling between 1980 and 1999. This stems both from reduced rates for men and rising rates for women.
- For women, more than for men, demographic, social, legal and cultural trends and norms determine whether their activities are regarded as economic.
- Women face more hurdles than men and are less likely to participate in the labour force than men.
- Women, on the whole, tend to have higher unemployment rates than men.
- The share of informal economy employment to total employment has increased in the 1990s. Women more than men are employed in the informal economy in Asia and in Africa.
- Men have higher proportions of their employment in industry than do women. In contrast, women's share exceeds men's in the services sector.
- For Asia and Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa, the share of women in agriculture is greater than that of men.
- In most economies women outrank men as contributing family members.
- A much larger proportion of women than men work part-time
- Labour Markets continue to be segregated with women occupying the positions with little or no authority, and usually receiving less pay.
- There has been an expansion of self-employment, part-time work and home-based work, largely associated with lack of security, lack of benefits, low income.
- In many Asian and Pacific economies where the economic crisis has hit hard, there is both an increase in unemployment and increase in the labour force, as persons, mainly women, rejoined the workforce in order to offset a loss of household income.

Source: ILO (2001) Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 2001-2002.

Section 2 of the paper briefly discusses the implications of the lack of adequate data to analyse women's work. Section 3 provides the conceptual basis and some practical implications of the market oriented economic reforms that have taken place in the last two decades nationally and internationally and the ways they have

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the meeting *Women's Rights as Workers' Rights*, convened by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity and the AFL-CIO with the generous support of the Rockefeller Foundation, May 13-16-2002, Bellagio, Italy. The paper has benefited from the comments made by the participants at the conference, many of which have been incorporated in this final version. I would like to also express my special appreciation to Cathy Feingold for her detailed and insightful comments on the paper prior and subsequent to the conference.

influenced women's working lives. As such, this section forms part of a feminist critique of globalisation. Given this background, section 4 discusses the patterns and problems in labour market participation and employment. Section 5 deals with the sectoral shifts in female employment. Section 6 focuses on sex segregation and inequalities on the labour market. Section 7 analyses the impacts of three important elements of globalisation, the impact of the information economy of women's work, the implications of migration (both within and across nations) on women's work and women in the export oriented production, in particular, the export processing zones. Section 8 concludes with the issues and the challenges for women in trade unions.

*The focus in this paper is on women as a working group with less attention being placed on the other differences between them (such as ethnicity, race, religion, etc), which could also influence patterns of employment. While it is critical to analyse these differences, lack of adequate comparative data as well as the need to underline overall trends and issues, has informed this focus.* The paper is also more concerned with the policy implications emerging from employment patterns and trends, rather than on use of statistical modelling to analyse the trends themselves. Use is made of the most recent published data on these trends and patterns.

## **2 UNRELIABLE AND GENDER-BIASED STATISTICS AND DATA**

While there have been recent attempts by the UN and multilateral agencies at improving the quantity and quality of sex-desegregated labour market participation statistics, the available data continues to be unreliable and in general underestimates women's work (see box 2).<sup>2</sup> They also rarely pay adequate attention to specific features which can play a role in determining the different employment patterns of and amongst women, such as ethnicity, race and religion. This implies that important inequalities and problems on the labour market cannot often be adequately addressed.

### **BOX 2**

The Human Development Report of 1995 estimates that global output is \$23 trillion and the non-monetized, invisible contribution of women to be in the order of \$11 trillion. This means that the global output should be nearly 50% more than the officially estimated \$23 trillion of global output.

(UNDP Human Development Report 1995)

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, there is useful new data available from the Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base (WISTAT).

Some of these gender biases are reflected in key labour market concepts such as ‘work’ and ‘labour force participation’. For example, conventionally, ‘work’ is defined as and limited to economic activity involved in the production of goods and services as defined by the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA). However most countries do not include production of goods for own consumption within this definition of ‘work’. This definition of ‘work’ also explicitly excludes unpaid services done in the household. Mainly women do this non-paid labour which is effectively made economically ‘invisible’. Such gender biases are also involved in the process of producing other key labour statistics, which because result in a significant under counting of women in labour force participation (Mata-Greenwood 1999).

An important effect is that little attention is given neither to the quantity and quality of unpaid work, nor to its effects on the type and quality of waged work undertaken by women and vice versa. In addition, the ‘invisibility’ of this work (in terms of money) implies that more work (such as looking after the sick, disabled, etc) can be transferred to this sector without any ‘costs’ to the government/employer. The demand for measuring and valuing unpaid work was one of the key concerns at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In response, a few countries have drawn up satellite accounts that calculate separately the value of some of the work done in the non-monetized sectors. It is noteworthy that much of the services provided within the household (done largely by women) still continue to be excluded.

### **3 THE MARKET-ORIENTED REFORMS IN THE 1980S AND 1990S: THE IMPLICATIONS THESE HOLD FOR WOMEN WORKERS**

The characteristics and trends in women’s work can be usefully analysed by placing them within key changes that have taken place at the global, national and local levels. This section will consider some relevant aspects of the market-oriented reforms that have been implemented in nearly all economies since the late 1970s and which have had major implications for the labour market and women. These reforms were closely associated with restructuring public and private sectors along what was considered market efficiency as well as the opening up of previously protected markets to international competition. Often seen as part of the globalisation process, this increased focus on international trade and investment has been backed up by

many multilateral institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as well as regional structures such as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Monetary Union.

### 3.1 The Influence of Monetarist Policies in the Industrialised Countries

The late 1970s marked the period when the industrialised economies were becoming more and more directed by the priorities of monetarist economics, important proponents of which were Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States. The monetarist framework, most notably propounded by the Nobel Prize economist Milton Friedman, argued that the free market would bring about the most efficient means of production and prices of goods and services. The diagnosis by the monetarists in the late 1970s was that inflation was destabilising the industrialised economies and it was necessary to curb the supply and circulation of money and thus bring prices in line with the level of production.

This monetarist approach was to dominate economic policy in the last two decades. In practice, it meant that the governments were required to tighten their expenditure and sell out public sector enterprises and services that could be run more efficiently under private ownership. In many cases, traditional public sector enterprises such as public transport were partially or fully privatised. There were also cuts in finances mainly in the social sectors of the economy, and most directly in the provision of funds for health, educational and welfare services. Many of these forms of social provisioning had been historically gained by trade unions and developed and implemented under the welfare state in the post second World War period, including employment and unemployment benefits for the workers and adequate social security provisions for the population at large.

As far as labour was concerned, there were efforts made to ensure that the unemployed became more 'employable' and further reduce some of the financial pressures on the state through lowering unemployment (and thus reducing unemployment benefits). One important policy in this respect was the *promotion of labour market flexibility*. Again the underlying principle was to allow the free

#### BOX 3

##### *Significant Aspects of Labour Market Flexibility*

- wage flexibility
- labour flexibility (part-time and other temporary work arrangements)
- flexible costs of production (removal or reduction of welfare policy measures)
- flexible conditions of work (dismantling of collective bargaining regimes)

market to play a more important role in determining the level and form of wages and to remove institutional barriers (such as gains agreed upon in collective bargaining processes) that could hinder this process. These policies have also been promoted in the countries in transition and in the developing countries. However, *an analysis of some of the significant aspects of labour market flexibility (see box 3) show that these had and continue to have the potential of making it easier to fire workers and to make them take up precarious forms of employment.* Many of these policies also had the effect of lowering the membership of trade unions and have been resisted by them.

### 3.2 Stabilisation and Structural Adjustment Programmes

Most developing and transitional economies in the 1980s and the 1990s implemented market oriented reforms as part of a package of measures that had to be undertaken for getting financial help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The IMF was more focussed on macro-economic stabilisation policies that controlled inflation through restraining government expenditure. As the countries had to pay back the loans in ‘hard currencies’ one of the conditionalities of the IMF loans was also usually devaluation of the local currency to stimulate exports. The World Bank was more directly involved in structural adjustment programmes, i.e. in programmes that would restructure the economies along free market principles and making the products more efficient and competitive in the international economy. The national state/government was a key actor in implementing these reforms, many of which actually reduced its role in the provision of important services such as health

<p><b>BOX 4</b></p> <p><i>The major elements of the reforms were</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• demand restraint (controlling budgets and cutting public expenditure)</li><li>• price decontrol (removal of subsidies and restraints in wage increases)</li><li>• reform of the trade regime (removal of tariffs and devaluation of the local currency)</li><li>• credit reform (increasing interest rates)</li><li>• parastatal reform and privatisation</li></ul>
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and education through privatisation and other cost saving measures. A proactive role was also pursued by the state through the removal of subsidies, restraints placed on wages increases, increased interest rates and cutting down on public (usually social) sector

expenditure (see box 4).

Most studies on the impact of these reforms have suggested that the vast majority of persons in the developing countries have experienced major hardships in the process of structural adjustment. Some of the common problems included

unemployment, underemployment and informal economy employment, fall in real incomes, food insecurity and scarcity, increased malnutrition and infant mortality, as well as decreases in health, education and other social services. Those who have gained in this process have been a numerically small proportion of the population, particularly those in the government and the local and foreign 'elite' who collaborated/worked with companies (usually multinationals) from the industrialised countries.

The privatisation of the public sector under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank has also often implied that poor people have been negatively affected with regard to essential services such as health, education and other social services as the new owners are primarily concerned about their own profits. For example, experiences with water privatisation in several countries in Africa have resulted in price hikes which make water less affordable and less accessible for the low-income communities with people having to resort to drinking unsafe water (Bayliss 2001, Hall 2001).

### 3.3 Trade Liberalisation and the WTO: The Free Trade Myth

At the global and national levels the market-oriented reforms take the form of trade liberalisation, which in principle, meant the staggered elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to the movement of capital, goods and services between countries. Many trade liberalisation agreements fall within the purview of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), an institution that came into effect on 1 January 1995 and currently has a membership of some 144 countries. The WTO argues that trade liberalisation would increase efficiency of production and allow countries to benefit from the greater access to superior technology and inputs, as well as economies of scale and scope. The WTO implements the agreements under the 1986-94 Uruguay Round of General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) that covers agriculture, investments and intellectual property rights.

#### BOX 5

##### *Imbalances in International Trade*

- Some 63,000 transnational companies with 800,000 affiliates account for about two-thirds of all world trade (UNCTAD 2001) World Investment Report of 2001.
- Nearly 50 per cent of current world trade takes place between affiliates of multinational enterprises (WTO 2002).
- The European Union, United States and Japan dominate the inward flows (71%) and outward flows (82%) of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows. (UNCTAD: 2001)
- FDI flows to developing countries are concentrated mainly in China (both in Hong Kong and in the mainland) while much of South-East Asia and South Asia, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa witnessed a slump in FDI flows.

(UNCTAD: 2001)

*In reality however, trade liberalisation reforms are being promoted in a context where international trade is not free, but unbalanced and biased against most developing countries.* Of particular importance in this context are three issues. In the first place, international trade is highly controlled by key multinationals from the industrialised countries (see box 5).

The second issue is that while developing countries have been pressurised to liberalise their imports by the IMF, World Bank and the WTO, the more industrialised countries have pursued protectionist policies towards exports from developing

BOX 6  
*The Double Standards Index*

This gap between the free-market principle and the protectionist practice has been captured in the Double Standards Index (DSI) developed by Oxfam. The 10 indicators for this index include measurements of tariffs, tariffs escalation, agricultural subsidies, the pace at which restrictions on textile imports are being phased out and anti-dumping actions. On the basis of this indicator, the European Union is the worst offender, followed closely by the USA, with Canada and Japan coming shortly after. It is calculated that the 48 Least Developed Countries loses an estimated \$2.5 billion a year in potential export earnings during the high levels of tariff protection in Canada, the European Union, Japan and the United States.  
(Oxfam 2002: 98-99)

countries with substantial loss of potential export earnings (see box 6).

The third issue concerns the negotiations that are currently taking place to expand the scope of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the WTO. The aim of this agreement is to remove any restrictions and internal government regulations in the area of service delivery that are considered to be 'barriers to trade'. These negotiations began in 2000 and are scheduled to be completed by December 2002 and are part of the written commitment that all WTO members would 'progressively liberalise' trade in services. As of now, the majority of countries have committed to liberalising just a small part of their services. However,

BOX 7

The US Coalition of Service Industries and the European Service Forum work in close alliance with government negotiators, helping them to prepare GATS negotiating strategies and priorities.  
Erik Wesselius, TNI 2002:3

there is intensive lobbying particularly from the more industrialised countries to expand the GATS agreement to a wide range of sectors including essential services such as health care, education, transport, water and energy (see box 7). These are sectors where the industrialised

countries and their companies have a major advantage and are likely to dominate.<sup>3</sup> The placing of these services in the hands of foreign private owners (with less stake in what happens to the local population than in the returns they receive for their services) could imply that such services become too expensive for the local poor.

There are four types or modes of international service provisioning under GATS (see box 8). While the industrialised countries have been negotiating for increased services

BOX 8

*Four modes of service supply under GATS*

Mode 1: Cross border supply refer to those services that flow from territory of one member to the territory of another member, such as banking

Mode 2: Consumption abroad, where the service consumer moves into another member's territory to obtain a service such as a tourist

Mode 3: Commercial Presence which involves the establishment of a territorial presence to provide a service (domestic subsidiaries of foreign of foreign insurance companies, etc)

Mode 4: Movement of Individuals from one member territory to another to supply a service. However, the Annex indicates that the members remain free to operate measures regarding citizenship, residence or access to the employment market on a permanent basis

via the mode 1 (cross border supply) and mode 3 (commercial presence), the developing countries have demanded substantial access for all their service providers under mode 4 (the temporary movement of Natural Persons as service providers). The industrialised countries are taking a more restrictive position limiting entry to intra-company transferees, i.e. largely skilled labour employed with multinationals. In effect this implies *a double disadvantage for developing countries. In the first place much needed skills are being siphoned off by the industrial countries. Second, the training costs for these skills are met by the developing countries.*

The next section discusses the implications of these reforms for trade unions while the last part of this section analyses what are the conceptual concerns as well as some of the practical implications of these reforms for women workers.

### **3.4 Market-oriented reforms and trade unions**

In many ways, trade unions have been viewed as groups or institutions that hinder the working of the free market as they function to better and protect the rights

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<sup>3</sup> Currently the services sector accounts for over two-thirds of jobs in the European Union's economy. The estimates for the United States suggest that service account for four-fifths of the US GDP. The international trade in commercial services was US \$ 1.35 trillion in 1999 about one-quarter of the global trade in goods. The industrialised countries exported nearly 71% of services traded internationally in 1997. The developing countries import and export less than one-third of the services internationally (Sexton 2001).



and benefits of workers and could ‘interfere’ with the free market/‘correct’ price of labour. Thus, *a policy accompanying and even preceding many of the reforms such as privatisation has been one of curbing the scope of trade unions*, often even disallowing them to function. In many countries, such as Canada and Argentina, laws have been enacted to limit the rights of public employees to engage in collective bargaining, strike or even to organise. The spread of free trade zones have resulted in discouraging or even shutting down independent trade unions, while privatisation and deregulation have led to job losses in the unionised sectors. Some anti-union legislation has also been introduced or strengthened in some countries, while new management techniques have also curtailed the collective bargaining potential of workers. The trade unions in Ireland, one of the countries where there were substantial increases in employment, found it particularly difficult to secure members in sectors dominated by the USA-based investors, particularly in computers and electronics, call centres and financial services.

Trade unions all over the world have been resisting many of these reforms, particularly workers in the public sector who are generally well organised with relatively better working conditions, secure employment and pay. They have warned that privatisation and the contracting out of public services would affect the quality of the public utilities and services. Workers in most countries that have experimented with the cutting costs and privatisation of health services have protested against the privatisation and the resultant hike in prices of essential utilities such as water, electricity and transport. The Global Union Federation, the Public Services International (PSI), has also challenged some of the privatisation processes and public sector reform.<sup>4</sup> The trade unions have also been in the forefront for demands for better and more progressive forms of changes. In some cases, though not many trade unions have also been successful in blocking privatisation. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank withdrew loans for the privatisation of the health care services in El Salvador after such protests.

There is also increasing mobilisation amongst trade unions with other groups in civil society concerning some of the dangers the GATS negotiations could have on

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<sup>4</sup> For details of some of these publications see their website ([www.psiu.org](http://www.psiu.org)).

workers rights, human rights and the environment. The AFL-CIO opposes the inclusion of all essential public services from GATS. It also supports the reversal of privatisation if it is in the interests of public interest, a process that is currently very costly (AFL-CIO 2002). The PSI has also expressed concern on the negotiations taking place within the framework of mode 4 and the possibility that these migrant service providers may not be entitled to trade union and other normal workers' rights of the host country (Waghorne 2002).

### 3.5 Women and the market-oriented reforms: A feminist critique

These reforms have had major implications for women and work, even if the

<p><b>BOX 9</b></p> <p><i>The four main roles of women in the economy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• producers</li> <li>• managers of household consumption</li> <li>• mothers and carers and as</li> <li>• active providers of community services.</li> </ul> <p>Structural adjustment programmes have resulted in a "marked deterioration" in the conditions of poor women. (Stewart 1992)</p>
--

language of the reforms appears to be gender 'neutral'. Some of these concerns are conceptualised below with attention being given to the impacts of the reforms on working women in their main roles in the economy (see box 9).

#### 3.5.1 More work shifted to the 'care' economy

The reforms deal with the money economy and pay little or no attention to the services that are provided, mainly by women, in the households and in the unpaid care economy. In doing so they also ignored the negative impacts that the reforms could have on these women. Privatisation has often led to unemployment (in the short and long term) leaving the household to somehow cope with this loss of income. In addition, there have been increased costs of public sector services such as health care, education and other social services through the implementation of cost cutting measures such as 'user fees' and increasing the 'through put' of patients (Sparr 1994). As women continue to be responsible for the services and production within the household, they have to cope with the additional pressure resulting from these measures. It is thus assumed that women in poor households can, with an apparent limitless supply of labour and energy support the 'shocks' of transition (Elson 1994;1995).

While the impact is less in the industrialised countries, even there it has meant an increase of work within the households, usually in terms of increased care work on the part of women. This in turn has restricted the possibilities for better jobs in paid

employment. In the developing countries, the process has been more drastic as the majority of poor women have to survive under very difficult circumstances. This situation is often compounded by health problems with poor women not being able to afford the 'user' fees, implying often that daughters have had to cut back on their education to help manage the domestic work and services (Sparr 1994).

The reforms also assume that the household is a non-conflictual unit and makes no distinction between the power and entitlements of members within the household. As women generally tend to be at a disadvantage on these accounts, they nearly always lose out in terms of consumption and other privileges in the household, something that is made worse under deteriorating economic circumstances (Sen 1990).

### *3.5.2 Institutions are 'bearers' of gender*

Markets and other institutions (such as firms) are not neutral but reflect the social norms in society including norms regarding gender. These norms are in many ways biased against women, and result in different opportunities and constraints for women and men (Elson 1995). Thus, women who participate in paid employment are also subjected to these norms. These norms influence, for example, the patterns of paid employment in society, whereby women are concentrated in labour-intensive, time-consuming, repetitive tasks often under male authority, similar to the activities they undertake in the households. Other examples of such differential treatment include differential access to credit, the tendency for women to be concentrated in certain low paid jobs, and their exclusion from skilled professional workers with higher incomes. Such biases are perpetuated in the implementation of market oriented economic reforms unless there is a conscious effort to deal with them.

### *3.5.3 Cheap labour and trade liberalisation*

Women, and women particularly in the developing countries, have a special role in the context of trade liberalisation. As they form the main bulk of the 'cheap' labour of a country and thus its comparative advantage, they are seen as important actors in the drive to growth and development. Thus, companies seeking to lower their costs of production and thus increase their competitiveness often changed their location to countries where there was plenty of cheap female labour. While some women might have gained income, many of these subcontracted units are small and

do not adhere to minimum standards of wages and working conditions. In addition, trade unionisation is often actively discouraged and even prohibited.

The shift to export production in agriculture has often been at the cost of domestic subsistence production, often leading to problems of food insecurity for the local people, and in particular the poor women who are mainly in charge of looking after the family. There is also the real worry that the removal of barriers on trade through WTO agreements could threaten local industry and increase unemployment and enhance the financial pressure on these women. In this context, it is also important to ensure that the outcomes of the current GATS negotiations do not worsen (either in terms of costs or quality) the provision of essential services education, health and other social services.

Increased poverty as well as lack of adequate sources of employment in developing countries have meant that women from these countries have migrated (temporarily or permanently) to the more industrialised countries for employment. These migrant women have been numerically important in domestic work and in health, education and entertainment/sex industries. In spite of the fact that they cater to the demands of the host countries, they are generally paid lower wages than workers from the host country, are discouraged from joining trade unions, and not entitled to other rights such as pensions, which are available to the local workers. In addition, these women are often subject to sexual abuse and other forms of violence. Their general isolation from society as well as the fact that their employment status is linked to their direct employer, hinder these women from making formal complaints about their treatment and other problems they experience.

Empirical information on these issues is provided under 7b and 7c.

#### *3.5.4. Women and trade unions*

As mentioned under item 3d, the reforms have often lessened the membership and strength of trade unions. And women workers have been amongst the affected workers. In addition, many women workers are further isolated from trade unions as they work in the sectors and in forms of production (such as subcontracted small units) where it is difficult to organise. This has implied that in an era when increasing numbers are joining the workforce, the possibilities of organising women workers under conventional trade union practices are being curtailed. This poses major challenges to trade unions. More on these issues will be taken up in section 8.

These conceptual and analytical issues form the backdrop to understand the trends and characteristics of women's work in the subsequent sections.

#### **4 WOMEN AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION: PATTERNS AND PROBLEMS**

This section highlights some of the main trends and characteristics of women's economic participation. This analysis is largely based on available statistics and (as already indicated in section 2) many of these concepts are gender biased and undercount the contribution of women. Given these problems, the analysis is concerned with the key concerns that have been generated for women workers and trade unions in the context of the labour market. It looks at the central parameters such as labour force participation rates, employment patterns and status of women's employment, key parameters to understand the nature of women's economic activity. Clearly the focus is on aspects which have direct relevance to trade unions and which could broaden the scope of trade union intervention and support. Unless otherwise mentioned, the data is based on ILO (2001), *Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 2001-2002*, referred to henceforth in the paper as KILM.

##### **4.1 Economic Emancipation and Economic Need Have Been the Main Forces Behind Increases in Women's Economic Participation**

Women's involvement in economic activity, i.e. work done in the production of goods and services as defined by the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), has increased at global and regional levels in the last two decades. This can be captured by the women's activity rate, or the proportion of women above 15 years involved in economic activities. Another parameter often used to measure the women's involvement in economic work is the labour force participation rate which is expressed as the number of women in the labour force (employed and unemployed) as a percentage of the working-age female population (usually aged 15-65 years). Both these parameters are used interchangeably and serve as guides as to the relative size of the supply of female labour available for the production of goods and services.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It could be argued that economic activity rates include a wider range of activities as they include activities included production for household consumption (as per the revisions in the UNSNA in 1993 even though as we have noted in Section 2, such activities are not counted in most countries.

The highest female participation rates are among the sub-Saharan African economies, and the economies in Asia and the Pacific, as well as in the more industrialised countries (particularly Iceland, Norway and Sweden). In some cases, the activity rates of women in the developing and transition economies are higher than those in the industrialised countries. The activity rate of women in Western Europe was 49% in 1997, the equivalent figures for sub-Saharan Africa (62%), Caribbean (53%), Eastern Asia (60%), South-eastern Asia (62%), Central Asia (59%), Oceania (57%) and Eastern Europe (53%).

The lowest female labour force participation rates are found in Northern Africa (29%) and Western Asia (33%), largely associated with religious/cultural constraints on women taking up economic activity. The most pronounced increase in the activity rates for women over the last two decades has been in Latin America and the Caribbean and Western Europe, the latter being largely associated with increased part-time work. Eastern Europe has seen a drop in women's activity rate from 57% in 1980 to 53% in 1997, although the economic activity rate has always been high in the transition countries. The equivalent figures for the United States was 58% and 60% respectively. However, no increase is seen in Southern Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Oceania (United Nations 2000: 110).

An overall analysis of the labour force participation and activity rates reflects some clear trends and concerns. We see clearly women are increasingly engaged in economic activity and are motivated to take up and remain in economic activity even during their reproductive years. Their increased involvement in economic activities reflects both financial need and economic empowerment. The latter issue has been important factor in the industrialised countries, and together with the promotion of labour flexibility policies has been reflected in increased part-time work. On the other hand, the hardships experienced under the economic reforms (such as those associated with unemployment, increased costs of living, increase expenditure on health, etc.) have been a major factor in many women in developing countries taking up economic activities. The most significant difference in the labour market conditions between the industrialised and the transition countries on the one hand, and the developing countries on the other, is the existence in the former of social security and welfare arrangements. Even if these have been reduced over time, they nevertheless provide a basic financial support for all people who are unemployed and in need. Such arrangements do not exist in the developing countries for most of the population. Un-

der these circumstances, persons, and poor women in particular who are basically responsible for taking care of the day-to-day needs of the family, have to take up all kinds of economic activities in order to basically survive and provide income for their dependants. The fact that many men's activity rates have decreased (see box 10) and

**BOX 10**

Men's activity rates have decreased between 1980 and 1999 over this period in practically all regions. This has resulted in a situation where the gap between male and female labour force participation rates has been falling between 1980 and 1999, stemming from both reduced rates of men and rising rates of women. (ILO 2001 KILM 2001-2002 (1))

they have migrated to look for jobs has often only increased the burden on women to make up for loss of income. As we shall see later, this has resulted in many women working in the informal economy with problematic working

conditions and with few labour/trade union rights.

Thus, while economic empowerment can be a powerful tool for social and political emancipation, it is unfortunate that the pressure to take up economic activity in the developing countries is also linked in many cases to increased pauperisation. *All trends suggest that the contribution of adult women to economic activity will only increase in the subsequent decades and a major challenge to trade unions is develop strategies to include them in the process of collective bargaining and in the trade union development.*

#### **4.2 Women Constitute Less Than Half of the Labour Force**

Women's share in the labour force includes the number of women over 15 years that have either worked or are willing to work for pay or profit or contribute (without pay) to a family business.

In spite of these increase rates of activity and labour force participation, women's share of the labour force is less than that of men. With the exception of the Ukraine where women comprise 50% of the labour force, women continue to constitute less than half of the labour force in all other regions although the gap is getting less over time. In 1980, women comprised little over a quarter of the labour force in

**BOX 11**

The analysis by sex shows that in every economy for which information is available, women are less likely than men to participate in the labour force. This reflects the fact that for women, more so than men, demographic, social, legal and cultural trends and norms determine whether their activities are regarded as economic. In this sense, women have to overcome more hurdles to enter the labour market than do men. In addition to the educational, institutional and cultural barriers that many women face, most women must also deal with the competing demands of household work (including childcare).

Source: ILO (2001) KILM 2001-2002.

Central America and in South America, these figures rising to one-third and nearly two-fifths in 1997 (United Nations 2000: 109 and 110). *This lower proportion of women in comparison to men in the labour force is not necessarily that women are doing less work. Rather as we have noted earlier, much of their work is unpaid and not recognised as work and not valued as economic and they are therefore left out of the calculations of the labour force (see box 11). In addition there are cultural, religious, social, education and other problems that women have to overcome to enter the labour market in some contexts.*

Women constitute a relatively higher proportion of the labour force in the industrialised and transition economies. Women constituted 42% and 46% of the adult labour force in 1997 in Western Europe and the United States, much of the increase in the recent period due to women taking up part-time work. On the other hand, women constitute a low proportion of the labour force in several regions such as Northern Africa (26%), Central America (33%), Western Asia (27%) and Southern Asia (33%). The prediction by the ILO is that the global workforce in the next decades will be composed of a greater proportion of adult women, a slightly smaller proportion of adult men and a smaller proportion of both younger and older workers.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4.3 The Status of Women's Employment: Dominant as Contributing Family Workers**

The statistics on the status of employment is typically distinguished between those who are (a) wage and salaried workers (b) self-employed workers and (c) contributing family workers. While the first category is the most significant in the industrialised countries and the transition economies (80-90% in some cases), the 2001-2002 statistics suggest that self-employed category is slowly increasing in the latter countries often as a secondary activity. Men are more likely than women to be self-employed with the exception of some 15 economies mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean.

On the other hand, in the vast majority of countries, women outrank men as contributing family members. Available evidence quoted in the KILM 2001-2002 also suggests that women tend to predominate in homeworkers, casual employees, and

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<sup>6</sup> See Newsletter No. 9, November 1997, Economically Active Population and Projections: Some Results, International Labour Organization.



‘work-gang’ members (members of a group of workers, who work together on a task and who are usually at the lowest echelons of the labour hierarchy). Also, women who are self-employed tend to be own account workers and members of producer’s cooperatives rather than employers, whereas the male shares among employers tend to be much higher. Even among own-account workers women and men tend to differ, women being more numerous among subsistence workers, for example and men among sharecroppers (ILO 2001 KILM 2002-2002: Employment). Most of these women are not organised in unions and are extremely vulnerable in terms of income, working conditions and terms of employment. In addition, they are also confronted with other forms of abuse and exploitation such as sexual harassment. These women need the support of trade unions to better their conditions of work and living.

#### **4.4 Women Have Higher Unemployment Rates than Men in Most Economies**

The trends in unemployment have been relatively stable and in some cases have even had a slight downturn since 1995 in most industrialised and countries in transition. Part of this is that many persons have opted for part-time work or short-tie work rather than no work at all. However, the same cannot be said for the Asian and Pacific economies where the economic crisis has had its effects, the total unemployment rates increasing in 11 economies and even doubling and more in Hong Kong (China) Republic of Korea, Macau (China) and Thailand.

Women tend, on the whole, to have higher overall unemployment rates than men do. The figures for 1999 show that 13 out of 23 developed (industrialised) economies show higher long-term unemployment rates for females than males. In the transition economies, four out of nine show women’s long-term unemployment to be greater. In Latin America and the Caribbean, two out of three economies show that women have higher incidences of long-term unemployment. In the countries which have been hit by the Asian crisis, we see that the high rates of unemployment have gone side by side with an increase in the labour force usually resulting from the women rejoining the labour force to make up household income (ILO 2001 KILM 2001-2002).

#### BOX 12

##### *Why women have higher unemployment rates than men do*

- women leave and enter the labour market for personal (often family related) reasons
  - women have fewer opportunities to find employment due to crowding of women in some occupations
  - women in many economies lack the skill and education attainment for many types of unemployment
  - women are more likely to get laid off first
- (ILO (2001) KILM 2001-2002: Unemployment)

## **5 TRENDS IN FEMALE EMPLOYMENT**

### **5.1 The Shift from Agriculture to Manufacturing and Services**

There has been a long-term trend in the growth of services both in the industrialised and in the developing countries, although it is more significant in the former where in 1999 the proportion of total employment in services exceeded 50 per cent. In the most recent period (1990-1997), the trend to services has become more accentuated. However, agriculture constitutes the most important source of employment for the sub-Saharan region, South-eastern Asia and Southern Asia. Agriculture also constitutes an important form of employment for women in these regions as they are often less mobile than men and cannot easily migrate to the cities in search of better prospects.

Men tend to have a higher proportion of employment in industry in most economies (109 out of 156 countries) than women and particularly within manufacturing. The services sector is the most important employer of women with nearly half of all economically active women working in the sector (women constitute 36.8 per cent of the labour force). The shift towards women in services is more pronounced in the developed countries although it is not insignificant in the developing countries. However, within this sector women tend to be more in the 'community, social and personal' sectors (which include education services and household services such as domestic work) (ILO 2001 KILM 2001-2002: Employment by Sector). Many of these public sector services such as health and education and which employ large numbers of women can also come under threat from the GATS regulations which could potential affect their jobs.

The entertainment/prostitution/sex industry that is dominated by women also technically comes under services. It is particularly important to pay attention to women in this sector, as they form part of the most exploited workers in a society, often subject to physical violence and low wages. The distress experienced by many women under the recent market oriented reforms has also forced many to take up prostitution as a means of survival. It is also an industry that has been boosted by globalisation and the expansion of the tourist/hotel industry.

## **5.2 The Share of Employment of Women in the Public Sector Is Higher Than in Total Employment**

What is significant about public sector employment is that it is usually paid and formal with high social protection even if the work is not always associated with high pay. As such it is an important source of employment to women. The market oriented reforms of the public sector, including privatisation has often meant that women are being laid off in the public sector, thus losing a relatively secure form of employment.

The public sector's share of total employment varies across nations. A study of some 84 countries and territories in 1999 showed that this share was close to 21% in the case of the OECD countries, around 40% for countries in transition, and 23% in developing countries. The share of women in public sector employment in most countries was higher than in total employment. There are also less women employed in the public sector in developing countries (35%) than in the OECD countries (50%) or in the countries in transition (46%) (Hammouya 1999).

However, there are some differences within these divisions. Within the OECD countries the share of women in public sector employment in Spain was about 35% while in Finland this share was nearly 70%. In the United States and in New Zealand this share was nearly 55% while in Japan it was about 38%. There were also variations in the transition countries with Estonia's share of women in the public sector being just over 55% while the comparable figures for Slovenia, Croatia and Romania being about 51%, 43% and 42%.

There was a much wider range in the share of the employment of women in public employment in the developing countries. While it was just over 50% in Brazil, the rest of the countries were below that. The figure for Egypt, India, Iran, Bahrain and Malawi ranged between 11% and 19%, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Ethiopia were about 25%, Trinidad and Tobago, Sri Lanka and Tonga were between 30 and 40%, while Ecuador, Belize, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Barbados and Colombia were between 40-49%.

### 5.3 The Growing Significance of the Informal Economy

Private employment is numerically the most important source of employment for the majority of workers in developing countries. This private employment can, in turn, be divided into work in the formal (regular paid employment in registered businesses) and informal economies. The informal economy is work which is typically associated with low levels of organisation, small-scale production, casual employment, little or no social protection, lack of job security or health insurance, and kinship or personal and social relations rather than on contractual arrangements with formal guarantees. The formal and informal economies are interlinked with the informal economy often supplying vital services and goods

to the formal economy at cheap rates, largely due to low labour and infrastructural costs. The informal economy is where the growing number of workers in the developing countries is concentrated. Such 'informal' employment has also

<b>BOX 13</b>
'I work 14 hours a day, every day of the week, Last week I earned \$1.70 an hour that was with my husband and two children giving me a lot of help.'
(Jenny, a homeworker in Australia)
"I thought that if I kept working for my employer, I would eventually get the money owed to me. I worked hard for 3 months but never received any money.'
(Mai, a homeworker in Australia)
Quoted in Fair Wear: The National Australian Campaign to Stop the exploitation of homebased outworkers 2001.

been stimulated by globalisation as shifting work from the factory to outworkers helps to maintain the competitiveness by keeping labour costs down.

Estimates by Women in the Informal Economy Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) suggest that the informal economy accounts for over half of urban employment in Africa and Asia, and a quarter in Latin America and the Caribbean. If agriculture is included, the informal economy employs three-quarters of total employment in Africa and Asia and almost half in Latin America. Statistical data from the OECD countries also show that there is a significant size in the informal economy (11% in Ireland and New Zealand, 19% in Germany and 20% in Italy).<sup>7</sup> More recent figures confirm these high estimates and their increase in the 1990s. They suggest that economies in sub-Saharan Africa tend to have the highest share of informal economy employment to total employment, and the transition economies of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States have the lowest shares (ILO 2001 KILM 2001-2002: Informal economy Employment).

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<sup>7</sup> WIEGO, 'Trade Unions and the Informal economy: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy', Geneva, ILO, p.1.

All estimates on the informal economy however indicate that the majority of workers in the informal economy as a whole, both historically and currently are women, particularly in the Asian and African economies. In Latin American and the Caribbean, men tended to have a greater share of the informal economy employment although this gap has narrowed in the 1990s. The transition economies present a more mixed picture (ILO 2001 KILM 2001-2001: Informal Economy Employment).

#### Informal Economy Employment: Some Estimates

<i>Informal economy share of</i>	<i>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Asia</i>
Total employment excluding agriculture	15%	18%	15-30%
Total employment including agriculture	45%	75%	75-85%
Non-agricultural employment	57%	78%	45-85%
Urban employment	40%	61%	40-60%
Poor employment	50%	NA	NA
New jobs	84%	93%	NA

  

	<i>Low income countries</i>	<i>Middle income Countries</i>	<i>High income countries</i>
Total employment outside the formal sector	80%	40%	15%

Source: WIEGO 1999.

Street vending and home working are two important activities in the informal economy. In some African countries street vendors constitute up to 30% of the urban labour force. Home workers, mainly women, represent up to 40 to 50% of labour in certain key export sectors such as garments and footwear in Latin America and Asia (WIEGO 1999). Home working on a subcontracting basis is also prevalent in the more industrialised countries with over 300,000 home based outworkers in the textile, clothing and footwear industries in Australia, which works out as 15 home workers for every factory worker (Fair Wear Australia 2001). Most of home working is in small sweatshops, often in a garage or in the home. The wages are typically low, the work (and thus the income) is unstable but when the demand is there, working hours are long. There is high dependence on the supplier with wages often being overdue, as the supplier needs to be paid before the women receive their wages.

In Asia and the Pacific women in the informal economy are also concentrated in small enterprises. These enterprises are typically often family based using simply labour intensive techniques of production, which involve repetitious monotonous work. These

enterprises are usually unregulated and vulnerable to police and other forms of harassment. In addition, they are usually dependent on subcontracts and make their own profits by minimising their labour costs mainly by squeezing on the wages of the women workers (Ofreneo 2000).

*Clearly one of the priorities of modern day trade unionism is to mobilise the women in the informal economy. One initiative to organise workers in the informal economy was the establishment of WIEGO, an international coalition which includes existing women workers' organisation, such as HomeNet (home workers) and StreetNet (street vendors) and the Self-Employed Women's Association (India) and the Self-Employed Women's Union (South Africa).*

## **6 SEX SEGREGATION AND LABOUR MARKET INEQUALITIES**

### **6.1 Women Are Concentrated in the Labour-Intensive, Low-Earnings, Low-Status Occupations**

*In spite of progress in some areas, women generally continue to earn lower incomes, suffer higher unemployment, and remain restricted to low-skilled, part-time, informal and unstable jobs (ILO 10 January 2001).*

#### BOX 14

*The differences in earnings between men and women in the European Union are due to one or a group of the following:*

- Women are concentrated in the less paid occupations
- Men work in sectors associated with extra pay, working time bonuses.
- Collective bargaining agreements linked to the recognition and value of skills that are biased against women's 'skills'.
- Systems of collective agreements that reflect the negotiating power of different groups of employees, women generally being weaker in these trade union decision making structures.

Source: European Commission, A Code of Practice on the Implementation of Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value for Men and Women, 1996, p.7.

While women are increasingly taking up economic activities, they tend to be concentrated in certain types of jobs usually associated with labour-intensive, relatively low-paid jobs. This type of labour market segmentation is linked to social norms and a patriarchal

ideology which historically and even today propagates the notion that women are more suited to such tasks. Within this perspective women are largely responsible for the household tasks and services which are typically labour intensive, repetitious and time consuming and which by conventional economic reckoning does not constitute value production. In addition, they are also generally subordinate to male decision-making power within the household. Such an ideology, when carried over to the paid

employment, results in the maintaining of the division of labour and low valuation of women's labour and a low status within the work hierarchy. Globalisation has, in this sense, perpetuated the subordination of women in the workplace. It maintains the sexual division of labour and even deploys new employment practices that give women lower wages than men.

Anker's study (1997) of 41 countries showed women's earnings were lower than men's all over the world and he concluded that flexibility and low pay associated with many 'female' occupations are due to the fact that these are 'female' occupations. Such inequalities are present in the industrialised and developing

**BOX 15**

*France 2000: Some facts on women*

- average pay gap between men and women is 27%
- 7% of managers in France's top 5,000 companies are women
- women occupy just 10% of top civil service jobs
- 80% of part-time workers are women
- French women occupy 10.4% of seats in the 5777 member National Assembly

Global Policy Forum 2000

countries. A study of the United States showed that 26.2% of women earned an hourly wage that was less than what was viewed as necessary to keep a family of three above the federal poverty threshold (quoted in Lapidus and Figart 1994). Lower wages and earnings mean less opportunities for upward mobility and greater financial pressure to survive.

**BOX 16**

Nearly one employee in seven in the European Union is on low wages (defined as 60% below the median salary in the country. 77% of employees on low wages) in Europe are women Part time work and low rates of remuneration are the main reasons for this situation.

Eurostat, Statistics in Focus (2000)

In the European Union studies have shown that typically women's jobs are associated with low pay, precarious job status with poor working conditions, inadequate social coverage and limited possibilities for promotion and upward

mobility (Rubery, Smith and Fagan 1996). However, the latest survey by the European Industrial Relations Observatory, suggests that the wage gap is lower in countries where women form a high proportion of the trade union membership. As an average, women constitute 39.2% of the trade union membership in the European Union and earn 79% of the average male wage. However, the equivalent figures for Finland are 53% and 86.2%, Sweden 52% and 82%, Denmark 48% and 82.9%, and Ireland 42% and 84.5%.

The wage gap also exists in developing countries and does not disappear even when there is economic development. A study (1996) on the relative position of women in 11 Asian countries (Hong Kong Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, India, China) suggests that there is no close relationship

between the gender wage gap and the level of economic development (Meng 1996). Her study is also important in highlighting the role of government policy and cultural influences in determining the wage gap, particularly the importance of antidiscrimination policies, such as equal employment opportunity policy, equal pay for equal work.

## 6.2 Women Dominate the Category of Flexible Workers

As mentioned earlier, labour market flexibility was actively promoted in the industrialised countries as a means of making workers more ‘employable’ and thus reducing the government’s costs of supporting them. This is a policy that has significance for women as they form an important proportion of the unemployed.

Flexible workers within the European Union are defined as those who are employed outside the regular full-time jobs and constitute basically the self-employed, part-time employed and those employed on a fixed-term (temporary) contract. They increased between 1985 and 1995 by 15% with Spain (increase in temporary jobs) and The Netherlands (increase of part-time jobs) having the highest proportions of flexible to total employment. Women have twice as high number of part-time employment than the total working population. In fact, the majority of jobs created in the 1990s have been part-time with temporary working accounting for just under half the rise for women (European Union 1996: 7). Paradoxically, the accompanying tendency to shift more ‘care’ responsibilities to the household could mean that men will occupy more of the better flexible jobs while women’s inflexibility will be enhanced by their immobility placed on them by their role in the unpaid care and domestic work (Duncan 1996: 401). Some countries have enacted measures to counter some of the discriminations experienced by part-time workers. The Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 in the United Kingdom gave part-time workers a right to treatment in the workplace that was no less favourable than that which is given to full-time workers.

### BOX 17

Temporary work is largely a manifestation of the weaker labour market position of workers in times of high unemployment. The largest share is in secondary jobs in the low-skilled occupations with women having higher rates of temporary work than men.

De Grip, Hoevenberg and Willems (1997)

Women who have also found flexible work an important means of combining their household responsibilities and careers have in many cases sought flexible work. The Netherlands is one such country and its experience with flexible work has been seen in many quarters as a new ‘model’ or example of ‘capitalism with a social face’



### BOX 18

#### *Normalisation and feminisation of non-standard work: the case of Japan*

The gender differentiated pattern of employment in Japan from 1960 to 1994 shows women as a percentage of all temporary employment rose from 46% in 1960 to 71.8 per cent in 1994. The authors argued that the Japanese economic restructuring was reflected in the 'normalisation and feminisation of non-standard employment' (p.34.). Thus, the Japanese model of economic growth was based on a gender work regime with women workers increasingly occupying the more flexible and less privileged labour segments.

Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato 1998

(Visser 1997). The country has actively promoted and has the highest proportion of part-time jobs amongst the OECD countries. 73 per cent of all part time jobs in 1996 were held by women, with 63 per cent of all working women working part time (the equivalent figure for

men being 17 per cent). The trade unions have also been involved in trying to get equivalent rights and benefits for part-time workers. In fact, the term 'flexicurity' has been associated with the direction of government policy to develop both flexibility and security for all workers.

Many developing countries attempted to implement 'flexible labour policies' as an incentive for multinationals to invest in their economies. Specific labour market policy measures included the easing or removal of wage policies, social security policies, access to jobs and incomes and to collective bargaining and unionisation. These policies resulted in greater numbers being in the vulnerable employment. In this context, female workers were often employed on a temporary basis and/or by subcontracting their low-skilled labour-intensive work to firms (affiliates or locally owned) which had to supply products at a short notice. The scale of production at the lower levels of the subcontracting was small and women here were less likely to be unionised. In addition, as was the case of Thailand in the 1980s and the 1990s, many of these women were temporary rural migrants who supplied the necessary labour for the manufacturing and service industries, usually in the informal economy (Kurian 1999).

### **6.3 Sexual Harassment and Violence**

In spite of increased attention paid to issues of discrimination and violence against women, it is unfortunate that women are still the brunt of sexual harassment at the workplace, in the community and within the household. Such violence and abuse of women's human rights is widespread and is estimated that about 10 per cent to over 50 per cent of adult women in all regions of the world are affected by it. As noted in the UNIFEM report that 'while the home and community are places where women

provide care for others, they are also where millions of women experience coercion and abuse' (UNIFEM 2000: 97).

The National Organisation of Women in the United States, based on studies, have found that 50-75% of employed women will experience sexual harassment on the job. There have been many initiatives on this score to counter sexual harassment such as the ICFTU-APRO Resolution on Action Against Work-Related Sexual Harassment (adopted in Singapore 2001). However, women's vulnerability on this score has been increased with more women joining the labour market (often under vulnerable circumstances) as well as the lack of accountability and the establishment of special economic zones which function essentially outside the realm of labour inspectors. In most cases, women in the developing countries have fewer possibilities for making formal complaints as adequate mechanisms and procedures do not exist to protect women. Moreover, these women are highly dependent for their income on jobs, and with the lack of any other social security possibilities for income, often feel more reluctant to make formal protests for the fear that their jobs might be in jeopardy.

As mentioned above, violence also takes place against women in the household. And yet, because the household is often viewed as a 'personal' and 'private' sphere, such instance of abuse and violence are not easily reported by the victims or dealt with by competent authorities. However, the household is an important sphere of work for women, whether this work is paid (such as domestic workers and even sometimes prostitutes and other entertainers) or unpaid (such as the caring for the children and the elderly). There are increasing numbers of reported cases of domestic violence against women both in the industrialised and in the developing countries. This is a clear signal to trade unions that bringing the 'household' as a sector of work and enacting appropriate protective legislation, might go a long way to serve the interests of working women in all their spheres of work.

## **7 SOME ASPECTS OF GLOBALISATION AND WOMEN**

Given the importance of globalisation in the current world economy, it is useful to pay particular attention to some key growth areas and to see how women have been affected in this process. Three such areas are the information economy, export-oriented production and migration and these sections below will highlight

some of the gains, problems and challenges faced by women in these areas. It needs to be re-emphasised that while these growth areas are linked with the international movements of production and services, policies to promote them at the national levels have been highly supported and even pursued by the local governments. In this sense, violations of human and labour rights that have occurred in these processes are also the responsibility of the government through active collaboration and participation or through negligence.

### 7.1 Women and the Information Economy

The information economy with its speed of communication has been one of the important aspects of globalisation. It has opened up many opportunities for women. In many cases it has allowed them to work at home and combine employment with their family work. The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) have also given rise to demand for certain skills which have been met by women. These are mainly in the areas of data processing, and in the creation of jobs in new call centres.

The ILO World Employment Report 2001 has focussed on ‘Life at Work in the Information Economy’. It has highlighted the importance and potential of ICTs to empower women, particularly through employment in data processing and in the creation of jobs in new call centres. According to the report, some 5000 women in the Caribbean countries were employed in data processing activities by the end of the 1990s. In India, women have occupied some 27 per cent of the professional jobs in the software industry, this share expecting to rise to 30 per cent in 2001. Examples have also been provided on how ICTs have empowered poor women. Sapphire Women, an organisation supporting women who have lost members to AIDS in Uganda was able to sell their products (traditional woven Ugandan baskets) on the Internet. The Grameen Bank Village Phone project enabled women to collect user fees for their mobile phones. SEWA, in India, has also organised computer awareness programmes and provided basis computer skills to their members enabling members to launch their own Web-sites and sell their products in the global virtual market.

BOX 19	
Region	Percentage of Users that are Women
Latin America	38
European Union	25
Russia	19
Japan	18
Middle East	4
Source: World Employment Report 2001	

However the Report also underlines what it views as *the 'digital divide' within countries which often reflects the gender divide*. Women use the Internet less than men, they are underrepresented in the core ICT science and engineering curricula in education systems. More significantly the report finds patterns of gender segregation where women tend to be at a disadvantage in the information economy being concentrated in the low-skilled, lower value-added jobs. As noted in the Report:

the diffusion of the technologies has been skill-biased and thus accompanied by rising wage inequalities. Although pay inequality exists between those who have ICT skills and those who do not, pay polarization also exists within ICT use itself. This polarization is often gender-based.

It also warns

as teleworking is emerging as an important mode of working in the information economy, existing social inequalities – particularly gender inequalities – will be reinforced unless proper measures are implemented.

Entering data and processing information can also have its own problems. Typical problems include eye strain, back injuries and repetitive strain syndrome as there is pressure on workers, primarily women keyboard operators, to work at a relentless pace and meet the necessary targets.

A study on new technologies in Asia also concluded that the many opportunities that were opened up for women provided employment opportunities in the services sector mainly for young women who were familiar with English. At the same time many women over 35 were made redundant. The study underlined the importance of women to have a greater say in the policy making process so that they could ask for improvements in training and social protection for those who were made redundant (Mitter 1999). Clearly, this is also an area where trade unions could make major contributions. However, most workers involved in such jobs, particularly offshore information processing work are not unionised.

## **7.2 Women and Export-oriented Production**

Trade liberalisation in developing countries was spearheaded by the development of so-called free-trade zones production as part of the need to have a more export oriented focus in industrialisation. Often called export-processing zones (EPZs), these units were typically associated with minimum government controls (particularly in the realm of customs-minimum duties and labour regulations), and focussing largely on labour-intensive segments of the production process. These zones housed foreign owned/

subcontracted factories that exported its manufactured products. Many of these companies have employed women in export processing industries in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and in export agriculture in Africa (Fontana, et al 1998).

The literature on EPZs is vast and diverse. In the current context of promoting trade liberalisation in the developing countries, the EPZs are viewed as strategic units that can improve a country's competitiveness in international trade. However, this competitiveness essentially relies on a cheap labour force, mainly women, who have relatively low wage costs both in relation to women in developed economies as well as men in their own economies (Fontes 1997, Shahra 1999).

Some of the earliest such EPZs, referred to as the maquilas, were set up some 30 years ago along the northern border between Mexico and the United States. US firms imported duty free components that were then assembled and exported to the US.

These industries were boosted by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which came into effect in 1994. This type of industry has now spread to many parts of Mexico and Central America in the production of mainly apparel, electronic goods and auto parts. Most studies have shown that the attractions of the maquilas included low wages as well as slack environmental and labour regulations. In addition, union (particularly independent union) organising is discouraged and there is poor enforcement of labour norms. Sexual harassment and forced pregnancy are also common.

Elsewhere studies have also shown a mixed picture with regard to the situation of women workers in the EPZs. There is also increasing evidence that the structure of employment in the EPZs has undergone some changes. Many of these are directly related to the need to up-grade technology to remain competitive in the global market. The need for more 'skilled' workers has meant that men (who generally but not always were more skilled) were employed in the higher skilled jobs that were created (Pearson 1998).

While employment and wages appear to have risen as a result of EPZs (Tzannatos 1995, Joekes and Weston 1994, Kabeer 1997), there is evidence that the long-term social costs often outweigh the economic benefits. Labour conditions in nine Asian countries (Vietnam, China (including HongKong) Indonesia, Malaysia,

BOX 20

Since NAFTA came into effect in 1994 the number of maquilas has increased in Mexico from 2000 to 3000 in 1999. During this period, the number of workers increased from 546,000 to over 1 million, hourly wages dropped by 9.5% from US 2.10 to US\$ 1.90 while real wages declined by 20%.

(The Maquila Solidarity Network 2001)

Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand shows that the working conditions were very problematic. In many cases, the women workers suffered from a variety of problems including high levels of noise, dust, heat humidity and even poisonous chemicals that exceed the acceptable limits. In addition, they often had long hours of work (sometimes even to seven days a week month after month) sometimes endured cruel treatment, and were forced to quit jobs (Asia Monitor Resource Centre 2002).

While exports of manufacturing have created employment for women, the situation is less clear with regard to women in agriculture, the sector that continues to employ the largest number of women. The global sourcing of food and luxury (exotic) items (for example, horticultural products such as flowers, exotic fruit, etc.) has drawn women into employment. However, these women usually are employed seasonally and on insecure conditions of work (Barrientos 2001). Some households that have shifted to export crops have increased their overall income. However, unless there is an equitable distribution of entitlements within the households it is not clear that women will benefit from this increased income. In fact, case studies appear to indicate that the opposite might be the case. The income from export oriented production is usually controlled by the male (head of household) and this income is not necessarily spent on food. Thus, women, while spending time and energy on cash crops for export (often at the cost of production for household consumption) do not reap the rewards for their labour (Tallontire 1999).

Another export-oriented industry that has developed more recently in the developing countries is the export of exotic fish products (also been closely linked with globalisation) with foreign vessels (and investment) searching for high value products in the waters around the developing countries. Many of the firms use intensive modern aquaculture and associated techniques of production which destroy the natural ecological environment with their techniques of production. At the same time, these industries also tend to use cheap female labour in the labour-intensive aspects of the production and harvesting.

An example of this can be seen in John D'Mello's study (1996) of the 'Blue Revolution' of the 1990s (the name from blue waters of the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal) which relied on the production and harvesting of shrimps for export. Here cheap migrant women have been employed in the grading, sorting, peeling and packing of shrimp. Long hours of work, poor conditions of work, low wages, controlled living

arrangements (isolated living in dormitories close to the factories), with work-related health problems (backache, skin rash, etc.) are some of the characteristics of the lives of these women. There are no trade unions, management labour relations are paternalistic and the women are generally unhappy, working only for the money.

A serious problem experienced by many women in the agricultural sector is the lack of adequate time to undertake new ventures and the necessary training and to have adequate access to extension services. Instead of dealing with the actual context of their work, export oriented cash crop production has often resulted in further stretching of their already exhausted reserves. Women have often had to work harder and even children have had to help with the harvesting of these crops.

A related problem is one of food security, which has become an increasing concern for many rural poor, the majority of whom are women (and children). The promotion of agricultural exports in Mexico, Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic has often been at the expense of food security.<sup>8</sup> The increasing emphasis on food exports in

BOX 21

*Few Benefits from Trade for Ghanaian Women*

- Export of male-dominated cocoa has resulted in lower levels of extension services, credit and marketing support for women's food crops whose production is then pushed to marginalized land.
- Domestic trade liberalisation and WTO rules make under-resourced women compete with subsidised food imports, while access to Northern food markets is still limited.
- Liberalised global trade has resulted in tougher competition among women international and domestic traders; more resources and skills are needed to compete, leaving fewer opportunities for women who are poor and disadvantaged and/or have a high burden of reproductive tasks.
- In the industrial sector, EPZ factories have created jobs and seem to guarantee basic gender rights (E.g. employment after giving birth) but trade competition pressures lower labour standards and result in very poor working conditions and wages. Export of minerals has increased male jobs but undermined income-generating activities by women while also affecting women's health.

(Vander Stichele 1998)

Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have resulted in a high degree of deprivation on the rural poor women (Mackintosh 1989, Bernstein 1990). It has also been argued that women are very unfavourably linked to the international food system (van Halsema March 1995).<sup>9</sup> At the same time, liberalisation of trade has also implied the availability of cheap food imports with foreign companies with higher productivity being able to compete effectively with domestic production. While consumers (including some

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<sup>8</sup> 'The "New" Internationalization of Agriculture: A Reformulation' by Laura T. Raynolds, David Myhre, Philip McMichael, Viviana Carro-Figueroa and Frederick H. Buttel in: *World Development*, 1993, vol .21, no.7, pp .1101-1121.

<sup>9</sup> A gendered analysis of food production, consumption and distribution indicates that women have been seriously and negatively affected in terms of food security as the controls exerted by multinational companies in all these arenas place women in an extremely vulnerable position.

women) benefit in this process, local, usually small producers are displaced resulting in problems of unemployment and poverty. Women as domestic producers are negatively effected.

Relying on (female) cheap labour to provide the comparative advantage in international trade can be short-lived. If improvements in growth result in increased wages this could mean that in time cheaper (female) labour from other countries could prove more cost effective. Thus companies would move around in search for poorer countries for their investment, and countries would have to attract foreign investment by providing their workers with lower standards and pay, a model that would be unsustainable in even the medium term. *Thus, the reliance on cheap (female) labour as a comparative advantage has serious limitations, if this policy is not backed up by suitable human resource policies, upgrading of productivity and products and appropriate industrial and trade policies.*

In reality, the emphasis on export oriented production together with the incentives provided for companies to exploit the natural resources of the countries have limited the scope of sustainable and secure employment for the women in the rural sector. There is a clear link between poverty and women, reflected in terms of shortfalls in food, education and health care. These deprivations in some of their basic entitlements can be regarded as a serious human rights issue. An important response of many poor women in these circumstances has been to migrate to urban areas in search of work and employment. Given the limited education and lack of skills as well as availability of capital, most of these women are absorbed into the informal economy where they live and work under very vulnerable circumstances.

### **7.3 Migration**

The recent decades have also witnessed the acceleration of the numbers of women in internal migration, involved in rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-urban migration in search of work. The first two streams are largely the consequence of the continued pauperisation of vast numbers of peasants and workers in the rural economy in many developing countries. The impact of economic policies, particularly the market oriented reforms have often resulted in households not being able to survive with few opportunities for work and other forms of livelihood. Thus, women (and men) are forced to move to other areas to find some means of supporting themselves and their families. In many cases,



there is a form of circulatory migration taking place, as workers move from one site to another in search of (often seasonal) employment.

Women have also been important in international migration and they tend to be concentrated in some selected sectors. A study in the Asian region showed that

- (a) Women dominated the clothing and garment industry and as a result usually worked in sweatshops or at home under the 'outworking' system. This system (sometimes referred to 'outsourcing' or 'putting out') involves larger businesses subcontracting work to smaller units that are then under pressure to meet the short-term demands of production;
- (b) Worked at domestic servants or childcare providers;
- (c) Worked as entertainers that exposed them to the risk of sexual exploitation;
- (d) Earned lesser wages than men.

Among the disadvantages they experience are the lack of schooling and host language facility as well as social isolation of women in the host country (Shameen and Brady 1998).

Some of this migration receives support from the national governments as it eases the local unemployment situation and the country benefits from the foreign exchange that is remitted by these workers. Much of this migration is done usually through recruiting agencies, overseas employment promoters as well as clandestine operators. Women often lack adequate information about the work that they have to undertake.

The data on female international migrants has been, as noted by the United Nations Secretariat in 1995, a 'largely neglected subject' United Nations, International Migration Policies and the Status of Female Migrants 1995: 56). Based on censuses of some 157 countries since 1970 the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis concludes that women constitute 48 per cent of the 77 million persons who were enumerated outside their country of birth. However, women outnumbered men in the United States of America, the largest host country, constituting 51% of foreign-born in 2000.

In most cases women attain immigrant status by virtue of their family ties with other immigrants or with residents or citizens of the receiving country. However, there is growing evidence that more and more women are autonomous worker migrants. Women migrants were important as worker migrants to the oil rich countries of Western Asia,

their earnings usually been sent home and providing an important source of income for their families. The most important source countries of female migrants were from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. The Philippines was an important source of immigrants. In 1987, 81,000 women were domestic workers abroad, 32,000 as entertainers and 26,000 as nurses. Most of the nurses were working in Western Asia, although Hong Kong and Singapore were also important hosts. Most of the Filipino women migrating as entertainers went to Japan. Quoting official statistics, it noted that in 1988 alone nearly 50,000 Indonesian women were working abroad constituting 78 percent of all workers deployed.

Filipino women were also important migrant workers in the more industrialised countries. It would appear that most of the women were employed in the domestic service and are thus basically catering to the needs of

BOX 22

*Many women migrants are exploited by their recruiters and experience:*

- contract substitution
- misrepresentation of actual terms and conditions of work in the host country
- inability to redress the circumstance upon arrival due to indebtedness and incurred prior to departure
- trafficked into vice activities

(Shameen and Brady 1998)

middle-class families which can afford domestic work, particularly as more and more women from industrialised countries seek work. In many cases these women experience a loss of status in terms of occupation and experience in fact de-skilling as they undertake work which is below their level of skills (Barsotti and Lecchini 1995).

Women in the Asian region have been particularly affected by the recent economic crisis, which has further stimulated the search for work outside their countries. The existing migrants at the same time became even more vulnerable as they faced the problems of retrenchment and threats of arrest of deportation if they remained in the host country. Migrant women also have few prospects if they should return home.

There has also been an increased international demand for prostitutes with the increase of tourism and other related industries. These women are generally in the hold of a trafficker who also exploits them and they often migrate from a low-income to a relatively high-income country within a region. In Asia for instance, there is large scale trafficking of women from China, Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The host countries in the South Asia region are India and Pakistan, and to Thailand in Southeast Asia. Estimates suggest that some 80,000 women and children from Myanmar migrated to Thailand as prostitutes.

International migration of all service providers can technically fall under GATs even if the industrial countries are restricting access largely to intra-firm transferees. Trade unions, including the AFL-CIO and the PSI have expressed their concern about the fact that GATS would favour corporations' ability to move workers without a commitment to workers' rights. If negotiations can be extended to provide important trade union rights to all service providers, they can go a long way to improve the working conditions of migrant women. It is a major challenge to interested groups including trade unions to seek out ways in which this could be accomplished.

## 8 WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Women have historically constituted and even today form a significant proportion of the trade union membership. Women constitute nearly a third of total global trade union membership. The AFL-CIO, the largest union in the United States has nearly 5.5 million women workers, while the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Brussels) has about 63 million women workers. A study of the Asia Pacific region shows that women constituted some 10-20% of union members in India and Bangladesh in the mid 1990s, while the figure was 20-30% in the Republic of Korea, Japan, Fiji. The proportion was higher in some of the other countries with women members constituting some 40-50% of members in the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and New Zealand, between 50-60% in Sri Lanka and Thailand and 60-70% in Mongolia (Ofreneo 2000).

### BOX 23

Women are more likely in the future to form an increasing percentage of the union membership. (ILO-ICFTU 2000)

It is very likely that women will form an increasing proportion of the trade union membership partly because of a fall in male membership and partly because women are

### BOX 24

In the United States women comprised 19% of union membership in 1962, this figure rising to in 2001. (AFLCIO 2001)

becoming more involved in organising on a range of emancipatory issues. In Ireland for instance, where women make up 44% of the total membership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the number of women trade union members rose by 11,720 in 2000 out of a total national level increase of 19,000 (EIRO 2001).

*However, these numbers, as we have seen, reflect only a fraction of the total number of working women in a context of increasing labour force participation. Some of the reasons for this low level of union membership amongst women workers are suggested below.*

## 8.1 Reasons for low level of trade union membership amongst women workers

In the first place, increasing problems of unemployment and financial insecurity on the part of majority of women workers has meant that they do not have the time to prioritise union activity in their day-to-day struggle to survive and meet the needs of themselves and their families. In addition, as we have seen women are sometimes employed in companies that actively discourage unionisation (such as in the free trade zones or in the informal economy). In some cases, women also face reprisals by employers (including losing their jobs) for joining the union. All these act as barriers to women being active in trade unions.

Secondly it is possible that many unions do not necessarily cater to the specific needs of these women or they do so in a manner that could be more women-friendly. A survey in 1998-99 undertaken by the Gender Promotion Programme of the ILO in collaboration with the ICFTU and the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities survey suggested that women often do not understand how unions can help them. A relatively common problem was also that women do not have the time to participate in union activities because of conflicting family responsibilities and (ILO November 2000).<sup>10</sup> Thus, there is a gap between the more conventional methods of trade union organising and the needs as experienced by women workers.

<b>BOX 25</b>
Women make up 70 per cent of all trade union membership in Lithuania. Yet only one of the four national centres (the workers' union) is chaired by a woman.

A third concern is that in spite of their membership numbers, women are not proportionally represented in the highest decision making bodies of the unions. In Sri Lanka, for instance, in spite of the relatively large proportion of female trade unions, women hold only 3% of the union executive positions, the similar figure for Australia being 25%.

## 8.2 Potential and Initiatives for Organising

- There is evidence to show that women would be interested and willing if provided the opportunity and means to participate in collective action. In the AFL-CIO's Ask a Working Women Survey, women on the whole favour

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<sup>10</sup> This information is based on the Executive Summary of The Role of Trade Unions in Promoting Gender equality and Protecting Vulnerable Women Workers: First Report of the ILO-ICFTU Survey.

- collective action. In particular, when asked if women should join together in groups to solve their workplace problems, 79% of non-union women workers said yes. Among non-union workers, 49% of women in 1997 said they would vote for a union while only 40% of men said they would vote for one. Non-union women consistently have been more supportive of unionising the workplace than non-union men. Both unions have collaborated in an initiative to improve the conditions and the power of women in unions and launched a global three-year campaign in 2000. Clearly this includes improving the promotional chances and leadership opportunities for women.
- Many needs of working women go far beyond the conventional framework of collective bargaining. Many trade unions have already enacted measures with regard to sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination at work. Of importance are also ways of combating abuse and violence of women in the family, of combining work, family and other community/public services. An interesting initiative is the Women's Union of the Dutch Trade Union Federation (FNV) which has only female members and which offer membership to all women, whether they are affiliated to other unions or whether they receive an income from work or other benefits.
- It would also be good if trade unions were to focus on the specific needs of workers in women-dominated sectors of the economy. Such would include health and education, as well as other services. Another sector that deserves attention is the context of globalisation is with regard to labour protection and labour standards. In the recent years, there has been increasing lobbies by unions and by NGOs to include core labour standards within the WTO framework. It would be useful however, if more women-specific concerns such as maternity/parental leave sexual harassment and discrimination and access to childcare could also be included in these discussions.
- Trade unions have successfully linked with other organisations working on common objectives. WIEGO, HomeNet and GROOTS (Grassroots Organisations Operating Together in Sisterhood) are some initiatives which have been important in this context. Trade unions have also supported women in the struggle for their rights in these different contexts. Tiano's historical study of women workers in electronics and textile plants in Mexico, Baja California

shows that women, who have been employed in the export processing, participated actively in the bargaining process (1994).<sup>11</sup> There is also the real challenge to link up with other social movements on platforms of common interest.

- Many UN organisations like the UNIFEM have also carried out studies and programmes that have actively supported working women. In addition, there are several local self-help initiatives that could link up with trade unions in their struggles for a better standard of living for women workers. The International Women's Communications Centre (IWCC) based in Nigeria has also spread information on the network to grassroots women through different forms of media like local language newspapers, pamphlets providing information broadcasts and videos on current issues. It is highly recommended that trade unions build stronger alliances with other agencies working on issues of common concern.

These different concerns and problems of working women force a major challenge to trade unions, particularly in a context when the overall membership has shown a decline in the last decades. However, trade unions still form the most organised labour sector in society and they have major role in bringing about these changes. Women union leaders have therefore a strategic role in ensuring that in the future, women's empowerment will be high on the trade union agenda.

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<sup>11</sup> She suggests that women can influence both patriarchal forces and capitalist accumulation processes throughout their activity.

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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Bilateral Trade Agreement:** a formal or informal agreement involving commerce between two countries.

**Commodity:** commonly used to refer to raw materials, including such minerals as tin, copper and manganese, and bulk-produced agricultural products such as coffee and tea and rubber.

**Conditionality:** the set of conditions attached to the use of its resources by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, involving undertakings and adjustment policies.

**Debt Relief:** an arrangement where developed countries, multilateral lending institutions, and sometimes private lenders, agree to write off the debts owed to them by developing countries.

**Developing countryB:** refers to countries that were primarily former colonies and remain poor due to the current global economy dominated by transnational corporations and Industrialized countries. *Also referred to as Aglobal south@ or AThird World@. There is debate around which term is most appropriate.*

**Direct Foreign Investment:** this term is defined as the building or buying of productive businesses by foreign corporations. When General Motors builds a factory in China, or when Mercedes Benz sets up operations in Alabama, this represents the buying or building of plants and machines outside of the home country.

**Export processing zonesB:** areas created by governments in developing countries to attract foreign investment.

**Exports:** Goods and services produced in one country and sold in other countries.

**Foreign Financial Investment:** also called ‘portfolio investment’, this means the buying or selling of foreign financial assets by banks and corporations. If Citibank deposits funds in a high interest bearing account in London, or Barclays Bank from England moves its funds from the UK to Japan, this represents a foreign financial flow. Foreign exchange transactions have mushroomed to one trillion dollars per day.

**Free Trade:** reduction of regulations and constraints on businesses to increase international trade.

**Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA):** a trade agreement that will extend the trade rules of NAFTA to the 800 million people living in 34 countries in the western hemisphere (except Cuba).

**Free Trade Zone:** an area within a country regarded as being outside its customs territory. Importers may bring goods of foreign origin into such area without paying duties, pending their eventual processing and re-exportation.

**Gender:** a social construct that informs roles, attitudes, values and relationships regarding men. While sex is determined by nature, gender is socially constructed by societies all over the world.

**Gender discrimination:** discrimination based on socially constructed ideas and perceptions of men and women.

**General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT):** the trade agreement first negotiated in 1945, that now has been signed by 135 countries and is administered by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

**General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS):** the aim of this agreement is to remove any restrictions and internal government regulations in the area of service delivery that are considered to be ‘barriers to trade’. Services could include libraries, schools, hospitals, banks, rubbish collection and even the water that we clean our teeth with are all services that feed our daily lives.

**Generalized System of Preferences (GSP):** A system to encourage expansion of manufactured exports from developing countries by making such goods more competitive through tariff preferences.

**Globalisation:** the increased flow of goods (trade), companies (foreign direct investment), money (finance), and people (migration) across national borders.

**Imports:** the inflow of goods and services into a country.

**Informal economy:** the informal economy includes those who work in small unregistered and unregulated enterprises, both employers and employees, as well as self-employed persons who work in their own or family businesses.

**Intellectual Property:** ownership conferring the right to possess or use products created by human ingenuity, including patents, trademarks and copyrights.

**International Financial Institutions (IFIs):** refers to organisations like the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that make the rules for the global economy.

**International Monetary Fund (IMF):** an international institution that seeks to stabilize the international monetary system by monitoring the exchange rate policies of member countries and making short-term loans to countries in financial crisis. In recent decades the IMF has broadened its role to lend to countries in support of structural adjustment programs.

**International Trade:** exports and imports of goods such as automobiles or apparel, and services such as telecommunication or banking are part of our global trading system.

**Maquiladora:** a factory that produces goods for export, usually located in Mexico, owned by foreign investors, and subject to lax environmental and labour regulations and low tariff rates.

**Market Access:** access to foreign markets depends on the willingness to permit imports to compete with similar domestically produced goods.

**Most-Favored-Nation Treatment (MFN):** the policy that provides to all trading partners the same treatment that is given to the so-called 'Most-Favored-Nation'.

**Multi-National Corporation (MNC):** a large commercial organisation with affiliates operating in a number of different countries.

**Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI):** a negotiated (but never completed) agreement at the OECD that would greatly restrict what countries can do to regulate and place particular restrictions on foreign corporations.

**Multilateral Agreement:** an international compact involving three or more parties.

**North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA):** an agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, signed in 1993, which guarantees that, except in unusual circumstances, none of the countries will put up tariffs or other protectionist measures against the goods coming from their partner countries. It

also protects foreign direct investment from nationalisation and certain kinds of regulation and taxation.

**Outsourcing:** when a company hires an outside company to provide a service or intermediate product; often, though not always, this company is from another country, is non-union, and pays lower wages than the home country.

**Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR):** a U.S. legal term that means the same as most favored nation treatment. A country that has been granted PNTR is entitled access to U.S. markets at least as good as any other trading partner.

**Privatisation:** the process of private, for-profit businesses taking over the provision of public services.

**Protectionism:** using tariffs, quotas, or other trade restrictions to ‘protect’ domestic firms or workers from cheaper, competing products produced abroad.

**Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs):** programmes imposed on developing countries as part of their loan conditionality by the IMF and World Bank. SAPs generally entail trade and investment liberalisation, privatisation, deregulation, labour market flexibility, and cuts in government spending.

**Subsidy:** an economic benefit granted to producers of goods, often to strengthen their competitive position.

**Sweatshop:** a factory where one or more international labour standards are violated.

**Tariff:** a duty (or tax) levied upon goods transported from one country to another.

**Theory of Comparative Advantage:** the theory developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by David Ricardo which argues that free trade benefits all countries because it will lead them to specialize in the production of the things they produce best, and allow them to buy more cheaply the products they produce relatively poorly.

**Third World:** a term referring to developing countries, which generally have lower GDP per capita, lower rates of industrialisation, and higher poverty rates than the developed countries (or “first world”). Developing countries are also sometimes referred to as the “global South.”

**Trade Agreement:** an enforceable compact committing two or more nations to specified terms of commerce.

**Trade Deficits:** Trade deficits result when a country imports more goods and services from abroad than it exports to other countries.

**Transfer of Technology:** the movement of modern or scientific methods of production or distribution from one country to another, as through foreign investment, technical assistance or training.

**Transnational corporations (TNCs):** corporations that operate in more than one country. TNCs have come to dominate the global economy and many are richer and more powerful than national governments. *Also referred to as multinational corporations (MNCs).*

**World Bank:** an international financial institution that makes long-term loans to governments for economic development projects. Some of its loan programs require governments to orient their economics more toward exports, imports, and foreign investment.

**World Trade Organisation (WTO):** an organisation set up to replace GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which is a series of meetings among member countries designed to reduce trade barriers. WTO makes these agreements legally binding.