

**Beyond the traditional approach:  
Gender statistics and quality of work\***

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**Beyond the traditional approach: Gender statistics and quality of work**  
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**I. Current issues in the development of statistics on gender and quality of work**

According to *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*, about 60 percent or 127 of the world's 204 countries or areas were able to provide data on the economically active population by sex at least once over the period 1995 to 2003.<sup>1</sup> The good news in this statistic is that virtually all countries that report data report it by sex; only two did not.<sup>2</sup> The bad news is that far too many countries do not have regular censuses or surveys and are not able to provide timely data on the economically active population. Moreover the number of countries reporting such data at least once during an 8 to 9 year period has dropped since the period 1975-1984. It is noteworthy, however, that even in the early period, the 1980 round, nearly all reporting countries disaggregated data by sex.

These simple statistics point up several challenges that must be faced to improve statistics on any aspect of women's and men's economic activity. First, improving the availability of statistics on women and men involves improving the general availability of data through censuses, surveys and registration data. Second, in these data (and in other series as well) the gender issue is not merely a simple sex disaggregation of data, but the more complex tasks involved with revising and developing new concepts and methods to be more sensitive to capturing the differences in employment between women and men. The underlying methods used in data collection need to identify ALL women who are economically active and the categories used to classify the data need to distinguish women's and men's economic activity.

Issues relating to quality of work are emerging as a challenge in the development of gender statistics. Two examples bring out the importance of this topic to the improvement of statistics for both developing and developed countries.

The first concerns the difficulty of selecting a meaningful indicator to measure progress in achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 relating to the equality of employment between women and men. The indicator selected, the share of women in non-agricultural wage employment, received a great amount of criticism. One important criticism was that the indicator measures only the presence or absence of non-agricultural wage work and

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*, (United Nations publication, Sales No.E.06.XVII.7) p. 57,.

<sup>2</sup> JOANN – I've highlighted the two sets of statistics because they seem inconsistent to me. Also, the last sentence in the para seems a repeat of the opening sentences.

not the quality of that work.<sup>3</sup> It does not capture the conditions under which women work, the returns of labour, whether they have secure contracts and other important features of their jobs. In other words, the indicator does not reveal that there are different types of non-agricultural wage employment and that some types are better than others in terms of earnings and/or legal and social protection. It does not capture what is happening to men's employment: for instance, what share of men's employment is non-agricultural wage employment. Another criticism is that the indicator captures only a small portion of women's paid employment and gives no indication of the changes in the overall employment situation of women. In many countries of the world only a small proportion of women can aspire to wage employment.

In view of all of these problems, the Sub-Group on Gender Indicators of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on MDG Indicators was tasked with improving the employment indicator for MDG #3. The Sub-Group together with the ILO and WIEGO addressed these problems by framing the indicator in a more comprehensive way. In doing so, they recognized the complex nature of the differences between women and men in employment and also the importance of guiding countries on needed data. This indicator will be discussed in a later section of this paper (see section III).

The second example relates to the growth in developed countries of more flexible types of work arrangements and the need to develop statistics that capture these new forms of work. Part time and temporary wage employment and own account self-employment represent significant and often growing shares of total employment in most developed countries today. These forms of employment are generally a more important source of employment for women than for men,<sup>4</sup> Moreover because of the flexibility of these forms of employment, they are often viewed as a positive development for they allow women to combine employment with family care responsibilities. What is less often seen is the quality of these flexible forms of employment. They tend to offer fewer benefits and social protections, more volatile earnings and unstable employment or, in other words, are generally more precarious. Comprehensive and comparable data on these types of employment in developed countries are not now available and developing them needs to be a key priority in the improvement of gender statistics.

The broad statistical classification that underlies both of these examples is the distinction between formal and informal employment. Informal employment is often associated with characteristics of lower quality work, such as absence of social protection, lower pay and insecure job contracts. In 1993 the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) adopted an international statistical definition of the informal sector to refer to employment and production that takes place in unincorporated, small and/or unregistered

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<sup>3</sup> Caren Grown, Geeta Rao Gupta and Zahia Khan, *Promises to Keep: Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*. Background Paper for the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality of the Millennium Project. (Washington, D.C., International Center for Research on Women, 2003)  
<http://www.mdgender.net>

<sup>4</sup> M. Chen, J. Vanek, F. Lund, J. Heintz, R. Jhabvala and C. Bonner, *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women Work and Poverty* (New York, UNIFEM, 2005), p. 42.

enterprises. In 2003, the ICLS broadened its earlier definition to include certain types of informal wage employment that occur both outside and inside informal enterprises.

Using this definition, informal employment is a large and heterogeneous category. It can be divided into two main categories:

- Informal self-employment including:
  - Employees in informal enterprises;
  - Own-account workers in informal enterprises
  - Unpaid family workers (in informal and formal enterprises)
  - Members of informal producers' cooperatives
  
- Informal wage employment including:
  - Employees of informal enterprises
  - Casual or day labourers
  - Temporary or part-time workers
  - Paid domestic workers
  - Unregistered or undeclared workers
  - Industrial outworkers

Statistics on quality of work need to include a comprehensive framework that includes **types of employment** such as these. An additional requirement is data on **employment outcomes** such as earnings, poverty risk, hours of work, presence/absence of social protection that are associated with different types of work.

This paper will develop the issues sketched out in this introduction. It will show how, in the case of India, activist-advocates recognized the policy importance of improving statistics on informal employment as a way to improve the quality of work and the livelihood of poor working women. What these activist-advocates achieved in improving official statistics through their determination, constant efforts and expertise provides an important lesson for gender advocates everywhere. The paper will then use the findings of recent research to point to data needs to improve understanding of gender issues in the quality of work in both developing and developed countries.

## **II. Policy importance of statistics on gender, quality of work and informal employment**

Since the mid-1980's, the Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) has worked tirelessly to promote the development of the Government of India's statistics on informal employment. SEWA- particularly its founder Ela Bhatt and its national coordinator Renana Jhabvala - recognized the power of statistics to advocate the cause of its workers and to inform policies and programmes to improve their situation. As Ela Bhatt put it: "...the employers used to say: 'Who are homeworkers? How many are there? Where are they? They are not there.' And they used to make fun of us – to ridicule us". SEWA recognized that by collecting data on specific categories of homeworkers -

bidi rollers and then incense workers – they were able to convince authorities of the importance of these workers and to negotiate their coverage by welfare funds. SEWA also used statistics to support passage of the 1996 ILO Homework Convention and to stimulate efforts in India and more broadly in Southeast Asia to improve the conditions of homeworkers. The results of these efforts also included the overall improvement in national labour force data.

SEWA has not restricted itself to small research studies but have taken an active role in shaping national statistical policy. It has lobbied the Government of India to set up commissions to study the problems of self-employed women; participated actively in the commissions once formed, collaborated with partners to do research studies, participated in the planning of surveys and followed carefully decisions on data collection efforts that relate to their members.

These efforts have secured improvements in the livelihood of low income workers. Another result which is important to the field of statistics is that India is now a leading country in the development of statistics on informal employment. This achievement owes a lot to the close collaboration of the national statistical services with groups such as SEWA. The impact of these efforts on statistics goes beyond improving data on women in informal employment. As over 90 per cent of the country's workers are in informal employment, a result has been the improvement of data on the total labour force.

The efforts of SEWA and others in India also point up the need for new work in statistics to capture the types of employment that women typically occupy. Gender statistics needs to focus on these women and not only on elite, educated women. The concept of informal employment provides a first cut or starting point which draws attention to workers in lower quality and often precarious employment. A next step is to improve the identification of different types of “informal workers” including homeworkers or outworkers, casual day labourers, street vendors, waste collectors, domestic workers. Some of these types of work are also relevant in developed countries, particularly among migrants. Another step is to improve statistics on earnings, not just on the earnings of wage workers but also on the earnings of the self employed. And statistics also need to be developed to show the links between gender, employment and poverty.

### **III. Improving statistics on gender and quality of work in developing countries**

It is widely recognized that renewed efforts need to be made to develop the statistical systems of developing countries. More regular data collection in censuses and especially in labour force surveys will improve greatly the availability of data on women and men in employment. However it is also important that new data collection efforts place priority on identifying the full range of differences between women and men in the labour force. Analysis of data from six developing countries carried out under the technical guidance of the WIEGO network for the 2005 UNIFEM publication, *Progress of the World's Women: Women, Work, and Poverty* points to the multiple dimensions of gender inequality among workers and the comprehensive and more qualitative data needed for

national monitoring of gender differences in labor markets. The main findings of this analysis were<sup>5</sup>:

- The labour force is segmented in terms of both formal and informal employment and women are concentrated in more precarious and lower quality employment:
  - Access to formal employment is restricted and public employment is often the best source of decent, formal jobs for women;
  - A hierarchy exists in which women are disproportionately represented in segments with low earnings.
- Within a given employment status category, women's earnings are lower than men's. Only in exceptional cases are women's earnings higher, for example where only highly educated women participate in the form of employment.
- Women spend fewer hours of work in remunerative labour than men, in part due to the hours they spend in unpaid care work.

These findings were based on an analysis of data which used the framework “*gender differences in the structure of employment*” (Table 1). The framework is based on a cross-classification of formal and informal employment, agricultural and non-agricultural employment, and status in employment. This framework was recommended by the Gender Indicators Sub-Group of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators (IAEG), the ILO and the WIEGO network as a set of background indicators to monitor progress toward MDG Goal 3 on gender equality in women's employment. Given the multi-segmented nature of the labour market, the IAEG cautioned that no single indicators could give a reliable picture of progress toward equality. The framework provides a template for basic data that is needed in every country to monitor sex differences in employment, specifically, data on formal and informal employment, agricultural and non-agricultural employment (or more broadly by industrial sector), and status in employment. Much of these data are standard in most countries with the notable exception of informal employment. Fortunately, an increasing number of countries have begun to collect data on informal employment. In addition, data on earnings and hours of work are important indicators of the quality of employment for women and men.

Collecting data on earnings from employment presents special challenges, in particular earnings from self-employment. Generally, earnings data are analyzed only for wage workers; however, for the 2005 *Progress of the World's Women* estimates were compiled which show both the feasibility and importance of data on the earnings of the self-employed<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Chen and others, 2005, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the concepts and calculation methods used for estimating the earnings of the self-employed see James Heintz and Joann Vanek, “Employment, Gender and Poverty: A Note on Methods used in the 2005 Progress of the World's Women”, A paper presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics (Delhi Group), New Delhi, 11-12 May 2006, pp.2-6 at [http://mospi.nic.in/informal\\_sector\\_main.htm](http://mospi.nic.in/informal_sector_main.htm)

The analysis for the 2005 *Progress of the World's Women* also examined the poverty rates among employed women and men through the concept of the 'working poor'<sup>7</sup>. Individuals were considered to be 'working poor' if they were both employed and living in households with income per capita below the national poverty line. This technique of analysis connected the status of employment at the individual level with the poverty rate at the household level<sup>8</sup>. The findings of the analysis were complex. In developing countries many employed women face a disproportionate risk of poverty compared to employed men since they tend to be concentrated in lower quality types of employment with a greater risk of poverty. However the risk of poverty among employed women was shown to be linked to the dynamics within the household. Whether or not a household is poor depends on all sources of income in the family. Consider homework which is associated with the lowest average earnings. If a homemaker is the sole earner in her family, the household is very likely to be poor. If a homemaker lives in a household with other earners, the household is less likely to be poor. Further, within households depending on the intra-household dynamics, some individuals may fare better than others.

#### **IV. Improving statistics on gender and quality of work in developed countries**

In developed countries, one of the key distinctions between the labour force participation of women and men is their different roles in part time work, temporary and other non-standard forms of work. For example, in 2006 in the Netherlands there was a 44 percentage point difference in the rates of full-time employment for women and men (18 per cent for women and 63 per cent for men); however the difference in rates of employment for women and men was only 13 per cent (66 per cent for women and 79 per cent for men). The Netherlands is not unique in this pattern. Data reviewed for *Progress of the World's Women* showed that non-standard work is a larger proportion of total women's than total men's employment. Moreover even in numbers, more women than men are in forms of non-standard employment specifically<sup>9</sup>:

- There are generally more women than men in part-time employment (both wage and self-employment) and temporary jobs;
- In many European countries the majority of workers in temporary employment are women;
- In Australia, Canada and the United States in 2000 more women than men were in several forms of non-standard employment that are particularly precarious, including own-account self-employment, temporary employment and part-time permanent employment.

Important policy issues related to gender equality and quality of work are raised by these data. Are these jobs an ideal that allow women to combine family care with employment?

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<sup>7</sup> Chen and others, 2005, pp 50-54.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the concepts and calculation methods used for estimating the working poor poverty rate see Heintz and Vanek, 2005, pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Chen and others, 2005, p.42.

Is part time work freely chosen or is it taken involuntarily? Are there penalties connected with these jobs in terms of earnings and social protection?

Research commissioned for *Progress of the World's Women* examined more closely the precariousness that can be associated with these types of jobs<sup>10</sup>. The analysis – done by Leah Vosko - was based on the 2002 Survey of Labour of Canada. It focused on temporary jobs – including fixed term/contract, casual, seasonal and on-call work (work through a temporary agency). These jobs had been an important source of growth in Canadian employment and in 2002 were 10 per cent of the labour force. The analysis shows there is a clear earnings disadvantage of temporary jobs which have important consequences for women:

- Temporary work is stratified by gender with women predominating in forms that are highly precarious, such as temporary agency and casual work;
- Hourly wages are lower for temporary than for permanent workers;
- Even after accounting for a range of differences such as education, years of experience and hours of work, the earnings penalty for working in temporary jobs was higher for women than for men;
- Household income to some degree offset the earnings disadvantages of temporary work because fewer women than men lived in households with low earnings. However members of minority groups employed in temporary jobs have a higher incidence of living in low-income households.

The new flexible employment arrangements are of growing importance in the economies of all developed countries, but they are not well measured with existing definitions and classification schemes. Since these arrangements figure so importantly in women's employment, improving their measurement is one of the new challenge that must be met to make employment statistics more gender sensitive.

These new forms of employment are variously described as flexible, nonstandard, precarious and atypical. They reflect the complex production arrangements of modern enterprises where the traditional standard categories no longer apply. For example, the line between self-employment and wage employment, the standard categories in the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE), are often blurred. Many outworkers and contractors may be classified as independent contractors or self-employed but in fact are dependent wage workers, working for a single company and have no authority over their work arrangements. Italy is one of the countries examining the increasing share of atypical jobs, and how to measure them, and has developed a typology for classifying these workers<sup>11</sup>. Other countries must also study the nature and characteristics of these types of employment with the objective of developing a set of categories that fully identify these employment arrangements. .

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<sup>10</sup> Chen, 2005, pp. 42-43.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Francesca Ceccato and Leonello Tronti, "The growth of atypical job in the Italian labour market" Paper prepared for the UNECE/ILO/EUROSTAT Seminar on the Quality of Work, Geneva, 11-13 May 2005 available at <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2005.labour.htm>



These new forms of employment in developed countries are similar to what the ICLS has defined as informal employment in developing countries. Flexibility and absence of social protection and labour standards are key dimensions that underlie both non-standard work in developed countries and informal work in developing countries. Global trends such as outsourcing, and cross-border migration are increasingly influencing employment in both the global North and South and make it important to develop a common framework for these forms of employment in both developed and developing countries. Doing so is related to the ICSE. This classification provides a basic conceptual framework for mapping the informal economy. However, it cannot distinguish precisely the full range of employment arrangements in today's world. Many work situations such as outworkers and contract workers do not fit clearly in its scheme. Another task involved with improving gender statistics on employment is to revise this classification scheme to make it more appropriate to the realities of employment arrangements today.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted key challenges in the field of employment statistics related to quality of work and gender that if met, would not only improve the availability and usefulness of statistics on gender but also employment statistics more broadly. In other words, gender and quality of work provide starting points – a basis for activism – which can lead to the development of statistics that more fully reflect the realities of the labour market today. Gender and labour statisticians together with advocates must work together to address the following challenges or needs:

1. more timely and comprehensive data through regular censuses and surveys, especially labour force surveys;
2. classifications and methods which are both sensitive to the gender differences in the labor force and the new forms of work that are becoming more prevalent in both developing and developed countries;
3. harmonization of frameworks for classifying types of employment to capture these new forms of labour across both developed and developing countries
4. data on employment outcomes, specifically on earnings, poverty risk, hours of work, presence/absence of social protection associated with different types of employment.

## BACKGROUND INDICATOR FOR MDG # 3

### GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE STRUCTURE OF EMPLOYMENT

Row		Women	Men
0	Share in total employment (Both sexes = 100.0 %)	%	%
<b>1</b>	<b>Total Employment</b>	100.0%	100.0%
<b>2</b>	<b>Agricultural Employment</b>	%	%
2.1	Own-account workers, employers & members of producers' cooperatives	%	%
2.2	Contributing family workers (informal)	%	%
2.3	Employees	%	%
	2.3.1 Formal	%	%
	2.3.2 Informal	%	%
<b>3</b>	<b>Non-Agricultural Employment</b>	%	%
3.1	Own-account workers, employers & members of producers' cooperatives	%	%
	3.1.1 Formal	%	%
	3.1.2 Informal	%	%
3.2	Contributing family workers (informal)	%	%
3.3	Non-domestic employees	%	%
	3.3.1 Formal	%	%
	3.3.2 Informal	%	%
3.4	Domestic employees	%	%
	3.4.1 Formal	%	%
	3.4.2 Informal	%	%
3.I	<b>Formal Non-Agricultural Employment</b> (3.1.1 + 3.3.1 + 3.4.1)	%	%
3.II	<b>Informal Non-Agricultural Employment</b> (3.1.2 + 3.2 + 3.3.2 + 3.4.2)	%	%