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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), in co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), carried out an action research programme on Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives from 1992 to 1998. This programme was meant to facilitate co-operation between gender researchers, economists and policy makers, and to encourage the involvement of national research teams and civil society organizations in national policy debates. For each country involved in the programme, national-level workshops were held to establish priorities for empirical investigation. In Bangladesh and Morocco, the research focused on the feminization of the labour force in the context of increasing export manufacturing and trade liberalization.

This is an important topic for many countries facing liberalized trade regimes as they are seeking to build their export manufacturing sector. It has been argued — most emphatically by neoclassical economists but also in a range of other development writing — that trade liberalization can facilitate labour-intensive, pro-poor growth capable of “including” hitherto “excluded” social groups. The tendency for many newly established export-oriented manufacturing activities to rely heavily on female labour has been cited in support of this contention. That this employment benefits women is a view that is widely shared across the political spectrum, including among many feminists. However, the subject remains controversial: within

the general discourse on global labour conditions, women workers in particular have been portrayed as a vulnerable segment of the workforce, recruited by international capital in ways that undermine existing labour standards. In addition, within the gender and development literature itself there has been a long-running debate about the implications of labour market inclusion for women. In the context of export-oriented industrial strategies, where women have been highly visible, interpretations of women's encounter with capital have varied widely. What has become clear is that investigation of this question must be both detailed and nuanced, taking into account individual women's direct experiences as well as the longer term societal changes associated with the terms under which they are incorporated into the manufacturing labour force.

The chapters in this volume shed light on various facets of women's experiences in export manufacturing in Morocco and Bangladesh, focusing primarily on garment manufacturing, which in both countries is the most highly female-dominated manufacturing sector. The countries within which the research was carried out, Morocco and Bangladesh, share some similarities, although their development trajectory has clearly been very different in recent years (Table 1). Their macroeconomic structures are similar, with Morocco being somewhat more industrialized. The adult female literacy rate is low in both countries, and is also substantially lower than that of men — a pattern that not only indicates constraints on women's opportunities, but that also suggests pervasive discrimination against females. The economies of the two countries are of similar size, although per capita income is much lower for Bangladesh. The most important difference for the discussion that follows is that Morocco established an industrial sector relatively early, and its growth has been slow, while the industrial and particularly the export sector of Bangladesh has seen exponential growth over the last 20 years. As will become clear below, as a result the process and terms under which female labour has been incorporated in the manufacturing sector has been very different in the two countries, with important implications for the social transformational potential of female wage employment.

Before turning to a discussion of the chapters included in this volume, we will first introduce some of the issues associated with female labour-intensive industrialization from both a micro and a macro perspective. These include: 1) female employment rates and conditions in export-oriented industry; 2) gender roles and gender subordination; and 3) the implications of liberalization and restructuring for female employment.

Table 1: Basic indicators, Morocco and Bangladesh

	Morocco	Bangladesh
<b>GDP</b> , US\$ billion, 1998	35.5	42.7
<b>GDP per capita</b> , PPP*, US\$, 1998	3305	1361
<b>% share of GDP</b>		
Agriculture	16.6	22.2
Industry	32.0	27.9
Services	51.4	49.9
<b>GNP annual growth rate (%)</b>		
1975-90	4.2	4.7
1990-98	2.6	4.9
<b>GNP per capita annual growth rate (%)</b>		
1975-90	1.9	2.2
1990-98	0.7	3.2
<b>Exports</b> of goods and services as % of GDP		
1990	19.4	6.3
1998	18.1	13.8
<b>Net foreign direct investment</b> flows (US\$ million)		
1987-92 (annual avg.)	203	2
1998	258	317
<b>Adult literacy</b> (% age 15 and above, 1998)		
female	34.0	28.6
male	60.3	51.1

\* Purchasing Power Parity

Source: UNDP, 2000. Various annex tables.

## I. Female employment rates and conditions in labour-intensive industries

Labour-intensive industrialization in the context of increasingly open trade regimes has led to a significant transformation of the labour force in many countries, marked by a dramatic rise in women's share of manufacturing employment. This trend has been most evident in Southeast Asia, but has also occurred in Latin America, Africa and the rest of Asia. The shift towards female factory employment has occurred both in countries with a history of relatively high involvement of women in the labour force, and in countries with historically low female labour force participation.

To what can this trend be attributed? There is some empirical evidence suggesting that export promotion and trade liberalization policies, where successful, tend to lead to the feminization of the labour

force.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between export-oriented industrialization and feminization is particularly strong for economies specializing in commodities that require low-skill content and labour-intensive methods of production. However, the phenomenon of female-led and export-led growth has been both geographically patchy as well as highly volatile (Pearson, 1998). Even in Asia and Latin America — the epicentre of this genre of manufacturing — export-oriented and female-intensive firms have gained a foothold only in some countries, while complex political and economic factors have precluded their emergence in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

Moreover, the feminization of the workforce is not necessarily a sustainable or an irreversible process. In Hong Kong, for instance, the emergence of new low-cost competitors in the Asia-Pacific region and the erosion of Hong Kong's own cost advantage caused growth in manufacturing industries to slacken and eventually decline in the late 1980s, as investment moved to countries with lower wage costs (e.g. southern China). The implications for manufacturing employment, and especially for the women who have made up the majority of the rank-and-file workers have been serious and more complex than the "frictionless" picture painted by the government and by many economists (Chiu and Lee, 1997). Micro-level studies provide an account of the "fading of the Hong Kong dream" which has "pushed working class women down the class ladder and backward to domesticity as their gender destiny" (Chiu and Lee, 1997:759). Women's share of employment in the export processing zones of Mexico has also declined from its peak in the early 1980s — not, however, because of a loss of production facilities, but rather because of technological upgrading that has eliminated many of the low-skill jobs held primarily by women (Beneria, 1995; Pearson, 1991a). Bangladesh may face both of these problems in coming years, as the trade advantage it has enjoyed because of the Multi-Fibre Agreement is set to expire in 2005. Technological upgrading will almost certainly be necessary for the garment industry to remain competitive under more open trade regimes, and women's low literacy rates will preclude many from obtaining higher skilled jobs (Battacharya and Rahman, this volume).

The rise in women's share of manufacturing employment associated with export-oriented industrialization has been explained in a variety of ways. Joekes (1987, 1995) and Elson (1995) have argued that it is due to the tendency for many newly industrializing countries to specialize in labour-intensive manufacturing sectors in which

women have been traditionally employed, such as textiles, clothing and footwear. Thus the increased female labour force participation rate reflects an expansion of traditional women's activities, with women employed in largely female sectors and the gender division of labour remaining essentially intact. Standing (1989), on the other hand, suggests that women workers have been substituted for men workers by employers seeking more flexible, docile and cheap labour as global competition increases. The chapters in this volume suggest that the traditional gender division of labour and the perception of women's dexterity helped to determine the initial choice of female workers in the garment industries, while women's docility, their willingness to accept non-formal employment status, and consequently the flexibility they impart to the factory workforce have been important factors contributing to employers' continued preference for female workers (see esp. Bourqia and Khan).

The implications of women's increasing participation in export manufacturing is also the subject of some disagreement. Ironically, some of the most negative assessments of women's entry into export-oriented manufacturing were made in the context of the first-tier newly industrialized countries (NICs) such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. While there is no doubt that incomes and wages, including women's wages, rose spectacularly over a short period of time in these countries, both the gender gap in wages and the degree of occupational segregation has remained large by international standards, and has shown little sign of diminishing over time (Joekes, 1995).

A more positive assessment of the impact of export-oriented industrialization for women workers — frequently made by neoclassical advocates — compares this type of industrialization to import-substitution industrialization (ISI). It is argued that ISI tends to provide jobs for a male "labour aristocracy", which generally excludes women, whereas the types of industry that expand in response to foreign market opportunities in an open trading regime rely heavily on the use of a female workforce. It is further argued that, in the long run, trade will raise aggregate incomes and wages in developing countries and in the process reduce the gender gap in wages. The assumption behind this assertion seems to be that in a trade-expansionary context the demand for female labour increases faster than that for male labour, so that female wages also rise faster than male wages, and eventually converge (Joekes, 1995).

The disagreements over how to assess female employment in export-oriented manufacturing are due largely to disagreements over what such employment should be compared to. Even though most

writers agree that discriminatory forces underpin women's emergence as the preferred labour force in a significant portion of the labour-intensive manufacturing sector, there is not a clear consensus as to whether the discriminatory forces which characterize women's employment here need to be assessed in relative (national) or absolute (universal) terms, and what weight should be given to the accounts and views of women workers themselves.

Both Lim (1990) and Joeques (1995), for example, take a relativist position and criticize some strands of the feminist literature for assessing the terms of women's employment in export-oriented manufacturing from an absolutist perspective. The evidence they and others cite with regard to women's earnings in factory jobs indicates that, compared to alternative low-skilled female occupations — such as farm labour, domestic work, small-scale local industry and service sector activities — these factory jobs often offer better working conditions and are certainly better paid. The picture that emerges from most of the studies in this volume certainly supports this position. Women employed in the manufacturing sector in Morocco and Bangladesh prefer this work to the other employment options available to them, and in many cases, especially in Bangladesh, choose to work in manufacturing even when they are not obliged to seek employment by economic necessity.

But a full assessment of the question of whether export-oriented manufacturing provides better opportunities for workers than does the traditional domestic manufacturing sector, Joeques (1995) adds, would also have to include some comparison of wage rates in export-oriented manufacturing with wages in the rest of the manufacturing sector — and the data necessary for such comparisons are seldom available. Taking the export processing zones (EPZs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) — for which there is more evidence — as a proxy for export-oriented manufacturing, Joeques is able to sketch a picture that is very mixed both across countries and over time: in many cases EPZs pay higher wages than in the surrounding national economy, but in others (e.g. India and Mauritius) the wages they pay are definitely lower (Joeques, 1995:27). Assessing the linkages between export-oriented manufacturing and gender discrimination in wages is even more problematic. The availability, reliability and interpretability of the data on pay relativity by gender pose major problems, especially if a comparison between export and non-export sectors is attempted. In some cases the gender gap in wages appears to be smaller in export-oriented industries, while in other cases the opposite seems to hold.

The chapters on Bangladesh in this volume suggest that wage levels in the garment industries are generally lower than those in the rest of the manufacturing sector. This is attributed in part to the absence of collective bargaining arrangements or social mechanisms for the enforcement of the national minimum wage, and in part to the lack of alternative employment opportunities for women and the consequent surplus of female labour. However, the gender gap in wages in the export-oriented manufacturing sectors (nearly 10 per cent) is only a fraction of the gender gap in wages for the manufacturing sector as a whole (49 per cent) (Battacharya and Rahman).

The chapters on Morocco paint a similar picture, with the chapter by Belghazi and Baden addressing the issue directly through the use of econometric analysis. Official data sources reveal a significant degree of “pure” gender wage discrimination operating in the Moroccan labour market as a whole. The main components of discrimination against women workers are the age at starting work (women who start working late receive lower wages), length of the working week (women are rewarded for working longer hours less favourably than men) and household headship (women heads of household are penalized in wage terms compared to women who are not household heads, while male household heads receive a premium in wages over other men). However, Belghazi and Baden also find that the level of wage discrimination is lower in the export-oriented textile and garment sectors than in the urban labour market as a whole.

While this observation may be taken to support the prediction from international trade theory that, over the long run, expansion in trade will raise aggregate income and wages in developing countries and reduce discriminatory forces, the micro-level mechanisms that might bring this about, and the gender dimensions of these mechanisms in particular, have not been identified or adequately explored in the literature. Moreover, the econometric results reported here will have to be tempered with two critical qualifications. First, in both countries the relatively low level of discrimination in export industries would look less benign if it signified that men who worked in feminized industries fared badly compared to other male workers, that is, that the feminized sectors of industry tend to have generally lower wages. The second qualification is that the very high share of women in these export-oriented industries renders direct comparisons of pay relativity (or wage discrimination) between export and non-export sectors problematic. If, with industrial diversification, women

become increasingly confined to a narrow range of occupations, a dual (male/female) wage structure may gradually emerge; it is thus imperative that the notion of discrimination be raised in a more dynamic sense.

The difficulties of making meaningful comparisons between export-oriented manufacturing and the rest of the manufacturing sector also become apparent when we turn to those conditions of work which impact on workers' health and well-being. Here there is some agreement across the political spectrum that physical working conditions — in terms of levels of heat, dust, noise and hygiene — are probably much better in the export-oriented factories than in the informal sector (Edgren, 1982; Joekes, 1995; Lim, 1990). However, the health hazards — both physical and mental — specific to some export-oriented industries should not be ignored. These can include the use of carcinogenic substances, long working hours, and also the nature of the work, which is repetitive, monotonous and fast, and can leave the young workers prematurely “burnt out” or “used up” in the labour process (Edgren, 1982; Heyzer and Kean, 1988; Lee, 1995).<sup>3</sup>

One of the contentious issues dividing feminists writing on export-oriented industries concerns the interpretation of women workers' own assessment of labour conditions. According to Gita Sen, the fact that young women sometimes voice a preference for this type of work rather than going back to the confines of rural households only emphasizes how harsh the conditions of rural poverty and rural patriarchal dominance are for these women, rather than being a positive indicator of the conditions of work in the factories (Sen, 1999). Providing a somewhat different reading of women's voices, Kabeer (1995) has argued that work in export industries in Dhaka has helped households meet basic survival needs, improved their security, and begun a process by which women are being transformed from representing economic burdens on their families into economic assets. Kibria's chapter in this volume tends to agree with Kabeer's interpretation of the situation in Dhaka. Although she documents the extremely long working hours of female garment workers — often from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m., six days a week — the workers themselves consider factory employment to be “cleaner” and less physically taxing than the limited alternative employment options open to them: brick breaking, agricultural labour and domestic work. In addition, as Afsar (this volume) points out, escalating dowry costs have added to the economic burden that girls are perceived to place on their families. Girls who obtain factory employment and thereby support themselves for a period of time are able to delay marriage — which

occurs, on average, at age 15 for girls in Bangladesh — and to have a better choice of marriage partners.

## **II. Employment, gender roles and gender subordination**

### **1. Women's employment and reproductive work**

Women in Morocco and Bangladesh typically voice a preference for formal employment in the industrial sector rather than the informal sector alternatives available to them. However, the predominance of young, unmarried and childless women in this sector suggests that manufacturing employment is not yet a viable option for most women in these countries. In Bangladesh, the average age of unskilled female garment workers is 16.6 years, and few female employees are older than 25 years. Over 90 per cent of female employees under age 20 are childless, and almost 60 per cent of women workers aged 20-24 have no children (by comparison, in Bangladesh as a whole, only 45 per cent of women aged 15-19 are childless, as are only 10 per cent of women aged 20-24) (Afsar, this volume). These figures suggest, on the one hand, that women employed in factories are delaying marriage and childbearing: more than 90 per cent of married female industrial employees report using contraceptives, compared with 60 per cent of married Bangladeshi women nationwide. On the other hand, these figures also imply that industrial employment is not compatible with childbearing: fear of pay cuts or termination of employment were cited as primary reasons for using contraceptives, and nearly three quarters of female factory workers who do have children depend on kinship networks for child care, while the remaining report managing childcare and employment themselves. Thus women tend to consider industrial employment as a temporary rather than a long-term activity. Because of the preference of employers for young women, and thus the perception that manufacturing employment will only be possible for a short period, marriage and motherhood are still regarded by women as the best strategy for long-term security; marriage and motherhood, in turn, generally imply the loss of formal sector employment (see also Kibria, and Battacharya and Rahman, this volume).

In many countries, gender roles mandating women's responsibility for household and childcare tasks mean that entering or maintaining formal sector employment is difficult for married women, and especially those with children. In Morocco, women with

household responsibilities often prefer to work in the semi-formal carpet sector. Although this employment is seen as less desirable than garment work by young women, women with children and other family responsibilities find that the flexibility of working hours in the carpet sector make it a more viable option for them, despite its lower pay rates and lower status (Bourqia, this volume).

In fact, more women than men take on casual, part-time, and homework, across a wide range of economies, because of the flexibility it offers them. And it is arguable that the vast majority of women who have domestic responsibilities have an immediate interest in a more flexible job structure that can offer them greater choice about hours and patterns of work and getting skills recognized and used (Elson, 1996). The key issue to recognize in this context, Elson argues, is not so much the disintegration of previous norms of “regular” employment, which were in any case always more applicable to men than to women. Rather, the critical question is about how workers can secure decent livelihoods to support themselves and their dependents. What forms of organizing and what visions of social policy are needed to make this happen?

At the analytical level, the reality of women’s extensive entry into the labour force, the erosion of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model and the questioning of women’s wages as “pin money” have been assimilated, although unevenly, into a wide range of institutionalist writings (e.g. Howes and Singh, 1995; Gore, 1994). However, some critics would argue, as both Fraser (1997) and Jackson (1998) have done, that the emphasis on formal labour markets central to both European social policy thinking and institutionalist approaches has a problematic gender sub-text. It assumes autonomy and “breadwinning” to be requirements of a universal “worker”, whereas “livelihoods for women need to be seen as including a legitimate reliance on men (and the state) for compensation for reproductive labour” (Jackson, 1998:26). This critique raises many discomfiting questions, not only for institutionalists, but also for many neoclassical economists who see labour market inclusion, along male norms, as an unproblematic and desirable livelihood strategy for women.

It is rarely recognized in the development literature that women workers may have different priorities from male workers: some form of childcare support, for example, may be much more important for them than having a minimum wage. In an insightful study of women’s employment and organizational strategies in an electronics factory in India, the authors show how the demands and priorities voiced by

women workers related to specific problems they had experienced as *women* (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996). Women workers organized to demand transport and uniforms, which were granted by management. Transport was seen as essential to avoid sexual harassment, with the company bus also allaying the fears of parents, especially of unmarried women. And the demand for uniforms was linked to the problems arising from the fact that women in this factory came from different socioeconomic backgrounds and many could not afford the higher standards set by the better-off. Male workers, however, interpreted the success of the women organizers differently:

*Girls do not know how to raise demands. They fall into the trap laid by management. They ask for general facilities while the real issue is wages ... now the girls have a bus, uniforms so they are just happy with that. They don't ask for wages.* (cited in Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996:115)

The failure of trade unions to represent women's demands for the provision of child care facilities and other needs specific to women employees, and the lack of initiative on the part of governments and enterprises to assume their share of responsibility, mean that ultimately all the costs and anxiety involved in the balancing of the productive and reproductive sectors fall on the shoulders of women workers. As feminist economists have argued, by refusing to recognize the costs of reproduction inevitably borne by women workers and their families, both private entrepreneurs and the state may be undermining the continued viability of the paid economy, especially if daughters are withdrawn from school to replace their working mothers at home.

However, proposals for recognizing women's special needs, or for subsidizing or compensating women for reproductive labour, are always contentious, and are especially problematic in labour surplus countries. Neo-classical economists generally view labour standards as impediments to labour market clearing: "excessive labour standards" are said to increase labour costs, cause unemployment and allocative inefficiency, jeopardize growth and drive a wedge between protected and unprotected workers, benefiting protected workers at the expense of the unprotected. In addition, as Khan's chapter vividly illustrates for Bangladesh, in many countries there are considerable barriers to labour organization, which is often a prerequisite for improved labour standards or the enforcement of existing labour regulations.

Women workers, in particular, are often seen as the victims of regulation. Regulations that are paternalistic — such as those which

prevent women from working in “dangerous” occupations or at night — tend to reduce the demand for women workers (World Bank, 1995:44). Given this trade-off between labour standards and employment, workers are advised to forgo standards and act with maximum flexibility in order to maintain their jobs. However, these criticisms of labour standards do not always stand up to empirical scrutiny. While it is true that some forms of protective legislation can be inimical to women workers’ interests, as the long-running feminist debate on the subject has recognized, labour standards are not inevitably a “cure worse than the disease”. Some of the earliest International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions did take the approach that is criticized by the World Bank report; however, pressure from feminist equal rights lobbyists has led to the revision of these conventions to ensure that protective legislation does not diminish women’s employment opportunities. New, gradualist approaches to labour standards, which work to slowly extend basic benefits beyond the organized formal sector, are being proposed and show some promise, and the possibility of an incremental extension of security and protection to the huge workforce at drift in the rural and urban informal sector economy should not be discounted (Breman, 1996). This may be particularly important from the point of view of many women, given the greater flexibility and independence that homeworking types of arrangements may give them in carrying out their reproductive responsibilities, and maintaining their social networks.

Maternity benefits are among the most important means of making employment compatible with childbearing. However, it has been recognized for some time that legislation that grants generous maternity benefits to women can work against the interests of the very women it seeks to protect, especially when such benefits are financed mainly by the employer (Hensman, 1988; Bullock, 1994). Such benefits effectively increase the cost of hiring women workers, and thereby depress their wages or discourage their employment. The neo-classical response to this situation is to argue for abandoning maternity leaves and other benefits specific to women. The World Bank admits that one way of providing women workers with benefits that take into account their reproductive responsibilities without reducing their wages or diminishing their employment options is for such benefits to be financed through general taxation and not be wholly borne by individual employers. But the final verdict of its report is that, due to the practical impediments to such a scheme — cited as “administrative difficulties and the risk of abuse” — women

in low-income countries would be better off without such benefits (World Bank, 1995:74).

However, others believe that the state has a responsibility to ensure that women receive some basic minimum benefits: the relevant ILO convention sets out the principle that maternity pay or benefits must be provided through a social security scheme or government funds, so that employers are not individually liable for them. While it is true that, at the present time, social security schemes are underdeveloped or overstretched in many countries, the difficulties inherent in the immediate compliance with this convention do not imply that its goals should be abandoned altogether. In some contexts women's organizations and trade unions may be able to explore alternative policy options for maternity provision, such as new forms of shared cost or social insurance systems. In Burkino Faso, for example, the unions on the tripartite governing body of the social security department have secured an agreement that working mothers will be covered by social security during their three months' leave, to redress employers' reluctance to hire young women (Cissé, cited in Bullock, 1994). Provisions such as these are unlikely to be applied in a uniform manner, given the weak bargaining power of many women workers, the rigid opposition of employers to regulatory measures, and the social identity of decision makers and bureaucrats at all levels of the public administration down to the labour inspectors. But they provide at least a resource that some women's organizations may be able to use to facilitate women's labour market engagement on fairer terms.

## **2. Women's employment and gender subordination**

Perhaps no aspect of women's industrial employment in developing countries is more controversial than the implications and meanings of labour market inclusion for the women concerned. Does industrial employment provide an avenue for liberation from social and cultural constraints, or are women workers simply exchanging domination within the household for domination by capital? Many studies have documented that what lies behind the demand for female labour is largely its perceived docility and "cheapness" — notions that have been deconstructed by several writers to show that they are not simply a question of absolute wage relativity, but also include working conditions, employers' contribution to the social wage, the manual dexterity and patience of the workforce to perform highly repetitive and tedious tasks with little formal training, as well as non-

militancy and acquiescence given the lack of more attractive employment options (Pearson, 1998).

Elson and Pearson (1981), in their path-breaking work on women's incorporation into export-oriented manufacturing in world market factories, provided a nuanced and insightful analytical framework for distinguishing its impact on gender subordination. They distinguished "three tendencies" in the relation between factory work and the subordination of women which suggested that factory work could either *intensify* the existing forms of gender subordination, *decompose* them, or *recompose* new forms of gender subordination (1981:31). However, as Pearson (1998) herself has recently argued, this analysis left uncontested the idea that women workers' interactions with capital and patriarchy were somehow structurally determined rather than open to negotiation and reconstitution by women workers themselves. Such structuralist accounts, critics argued, rendered women workers "faceless and voiceless" (Wolf, 1992:9) and attributed much more personality and animation to capital than to the women it exploits (Ong, 1988:84). At a more general level, the oversight highlighted some of the difficulties of integrating an actor-orientation in structuralist analyses.

Some of the feminist research that was recording women's own understandings of their work, and their experiences of engagement with factory management, provided somewhat diverse answers to some of the key questions that Elson and Pearson (1981) had raised. In-depth anthropological studies carried out in the 1970s and 1980s suggested that in the East Asian societies with sizeable ethnic Chinese populations, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, family and kinship systems marked by strong gender and age hierarchies and emphasis on intergenerational obligations were producing a perverse "dutiful daughters" syndrome, whereby parents took their daughters out of school early and pushed them into the labour market, while they channeled their daughters' earnings into the education of their sons (Greenhalgh, 1985; Kung, 1983; Salaff, 1990). Despite their earnings, opting out of familial residential arrangements was constrained by the expectation that women remain at home until married, by the obligation to "repay" parents and also by public housing policies which were either given only to families according to need criterion (Hong Kong), or organized through tightly supervised dormitories (Taiwan) (Salaff, 1990). Indicative of the extent to which the East Asian family system had dampened the transformatory potential of factory work was the observation that one of the few ways in which these young women gain satisfaction is

by repaying their “debt” (of birth and upbringing) to their families (Lim, 1990).

Wolf’s (1992) account of industrialization in rural Java suggested that the young female factory employees there did not seem to submit their needs to the betterment of the family economy in the way that Taiwanese daughters did. Wolf in fact argued that factory work in Java was giving young women the tools with which to “hack and whittle away at parental and patriarchal controls over their lives, at least for a certain period, with longer-term implications such as deciding when and whom to marry” (1992:254). However, the increased field of maneuvering that factory work had offered the Javanese daughters at home was matched by different patriarchal controls in the factory setting that kept these factory women “relatively acquiescent, poorly paid and vastly unprotected in industrial jobs that are often dangerous” (Wolf, 1992:254). The increased voice and agency in the familial sphere did not seem to carry over into the factory: the managers and the work discipline seemed to be much less flexible and much more overwhelming than were parents in their rules and discipline.

A similar conclusion emerged from research on garment factory workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Kabeer, 1995). Prior to the growth of the garment industry, women’s entry into the public domain in search of employment had previously been associated with dire economic need. The availability of factory work, Kabeer argued, had not altered some of the striking features of gender subordination in this context, such as women’s dependence on male protection (even though it may have reduced their dependence on male *provision*). Nevertheless, women’s ability to earn a wage (whether their wages disappeared into a common pool, were retained under their own management or handed over to or appropriated by household heads or other senior members) had made a difference in how women were perceived and treated, as well as in their feelings of self-worth. The increased sense of power became even more visible in moments of crisis when the expanded possibilities offered by the strengthening of women’s “fall-back position” allowed them to walk out of, or not enter into, relationships which undermined their agency in unacceptable ways (Kabeer, 1995:35).

The chapters on Bangladesh in this volume indicate that women there are still largely constrained by societal norms and limitations to depend on marriage for long-term security. The implications of industrial employment for women within the household must be evaluated in this context. Afsar establishes that female factory workers

remain unmarried and childless longer than do girls in rural areas, most of whom are married by age 15. Such early marriage is the result of societal perceptions of young women as being economic burdens to their families, especially in view of the dowry inflation that has taken place in recent years. For these reasons, girls are often married off as soon as possible when suitable dowry agreements can be made. The factory women are generally not deferring marriage simply because they prefer employment; rather they are using employment as a way to reduce the burdens they place upon their families, which in turn buys them both some time before marriage and a better choice of marriage partners. It is interesting to note that, although Afsar reports that some young women remit a substantial proportion of their wages to their sending families, Kibria's interviews indicate that, because of the very low wages paid, many female factory employees rely on their families for the costs of establishing them in Dhaka and for periodically subsidizing their living expenses. The young women report being glad to reduce some of the burden of their upkeep for their families, as well as to be able to make some contribution to their dowries.

The chapters on Morocco, however, provide a less sanguine account of the impact of employment on household gender relations. Women workers who were interviewed neither acknowledged the emancipating possibilities of wage work for themselves, nor was their economic contribution acknowledged and valued by family members (Bourqia). Clearly, women's entry into labour market situations that are to some extent similar is nevertheless experienced very differently depending on the social and cultural configurations within which different groups of women find themselves. In Bangladesh, the very rapid growth of the textile industry has drawn into the workforce women who otherwise would not have entered wage employment, and women who have left their natal home to seek employment. Under these circumstances, Bangladeshi female factory workers have relatively little difficulty in establishing a significant degree of control over their earnings. In Morocco, on the other hand, the growth of the garment industry has been slow. Rather than drawing additional workers into the labour force, its labour needs have largely been met by women and girls who would have been expected to seek employment in any case because of the economic situation of their families. These workers generally remain in their natal home, and have little control over their earnings.

The assessment of working conditions for women in both countries studied is also rather bleak. The terms under which women

participate in labour markets carry and reproduce societal gender norms that are distinctly biased against women. The chapters on both Bangladesh and Morocco reveal authoritarian management practices prevailing in female-intensive enterprises. This is consistent with much of the literature examining such enterprises in other countries. Export-oriented production processes tend to reproduce gender hierarchies, providing employment that is in many ways exploitative under working conditions that are far from ideal — Lee's (1995) account of labour control in a Shenzhen plant, in particular, provides a vivid illustration of this point. But such "despotic" labour regimes are social constructions that are both contested and invested with different meanings and purposes by different parties. Lee shows how the women workers in a Hong Kong plant used family duties as a pretext for circumventing certain managerial demands, citing gender-based inconvenience and their mothering burdens at home to reject management demands for assignments which required cross-border commuting and overnight stays (Lee, 1995). Bourqia's discussion of absenteeism, tardiness, work slowdowns and "collective hysteria" in Moroccan factories provides examples of other types of tactics employed to resist demanding and restrictive management practices.

Such fine-grained accounts, which provide a contextual analysis of labour force formation taking into account workers' histories, familial and kinship relations and local networks, can also provide better insight into issues relating to collective action — suggesting why traditional trade union strategies have proven so problematic in some contexts. In South Africa, for example, where Taiwanese industrialists have invested in garment factories employing women, Hart (1995) argues that the fact that trade unions have experienced extreme difficulties in organizing clothing workers to press for higher wages and better working conditions reflects not only the adamant opposition of the foreign industrialists, but also broader processes of labour force formation and the desperate search by huge numbers of dispossessed people for a modicum of economic and social security.

This is also the picture that emerges from Khan's study of organized labour in Bangladesh (this volume), where there is a near absence of collective bargaining arrangements in the ready-made garment industries, and industrial conflicts are often resolved through autocratic and unilateral decisions of the owner-managers. In some instances, patrimonial relations have been re-created through the recruitment of workers from villages where the owner-managers are

among the landowning elite. While it true that most women workers resort to individual strategies for obtaining higher wages (Afsar), those workers who have sought to form unions to achieve their legally sanctioned rights (such as timely wages, proper remuneration for overtime, and maternity leave) have faced strong opposition from the management. The negative perceptions of the latter towards trade unionism — which seem to emanate at least in part from the history of unionism in the public sector — have in effect prevented the healthy growth of trade unions in the garment factories, with the outcome that a pervasive patron-clientelist nexus has developed between interested male outsiders and mostly female garment workers. The existing male-dominated garment federations have thus far been unable to represent the interests of women workers adequately.

An assessment of the impact of wage employment on gender subordination must include not only analyses of household and conjugal relations and conditions on the factory floor, but also an analysis of employment's impact on women in the public sphere. In contexts in which young women have traditionally been tightly controlled and closely guarded, the very fact of employment — which involves spending the majority of the day outside of parental or spousal control, and which often necessitates walking unescorted on public streets and using public transport — greatly enlarges the public space legitimately accessible to women. Kibria's interviews with Bangladeshi women, many of whom live independently as a direct result of their employment, convey a sense of the range of new experiences that have been opened for them. They clearly enjoy their newly-found independence and the choices now available to them. Even in Morocco, where female factory workers seldom leave their parents' households and are often escorted to their jobs, factory work affords occasional opportunities for independence. Bourqia reports that girls are delighted to take advantage of unannounced work holidays to spend an unfettered day "on the town", unconstrained by family oversight.

The consequences of opening public space to women as a result of employment are likely to be compounded over the longer term. When young women are seen to have legitimate business in public, their demands for protection from harassment are also considered legitimate. Indeed, a number of private and public initiatives to protect women workers are being initiated in Bangladesh. Such initiatives will not only benefit current workers, but will also make public spaces more accessible to all women. In turn, the increased acceptability of women in public space is likely to increase their options and thus

their bargaining power within marriage. Already, although older people in Bangladesh still consider employment to decrease a woman's marriageability, among younger people it is considered an asset, indicating both a woman's willingness to undertake hard work and her ability to contribute to household expenses if this becomes necessary.

### **III. Liberalization, restructuring and female employment**

The current emphasis on trade liberalization and economic restructuring will affect many countries that have a large female labour force in labour-intensive industries. There will be even more emphasis on competitiveness; given the limits to productivity of low-skill labour-intensive strategies, increasing competitiveness must come in large part from technological upgrading and increasing labour productivity. Such a strategy is likely to result in a workforce both better trained and better compensated, although, at least in the short term, it may also result in overall job losses. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that women will be the first to lose their jobs, and the last to receive the education and training necessary for them to compete in the new labour force.

Low-end, poorly paid jobs provide a pool of relatively accessible first-entry employment opportunities which help integrate young women migrants from rural areas in many countries. Women workers occupy the lower rungs in both garment and electronics manufacturing even though, in terms of education, they may not be disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts.<sup>4</sup> Women are very often recruited as unskilled workers (usually as apprentices to begin with), given very little training and face limited promotion prospects. As a result they often practice "job hopping" from one firm to another as a way of improving their grade and earnings (Edgren, 1982; Kibria, Bourqia, this volume).

The country studies in this volume reveal a certain amount of disingenuousness among employers, who complain about the instability of women workers and the high levels of labour turnover, but who subscribe to a system of management and production organization that finds a high level of instability functional and wish to retain only a small group of stable workers at the centre. While management in Morocco speak of the dire need for skilled and educated workers, they are reluctant to hire workers with degrees

(who may not be so malleable, and who demand higher wages). A similar reluctance is documented for Bangladesh, where entrepreneurs refuse to hire educated workers, preferring less-educated and unskilled employees. The econometric exercise on the determinants of wage discrimination in Morocco provides further evidence of the problematic relationship between education and employment. In the textile export sector a primary diploma has little effect on women's wages, while it has a strong positive impact on men's wages; thus at higher levels of education the gender discrimination in wages is accentuated (Belghazi and Baden). The reluctance to hire educated female workers is likely to act as a constraint on the capacity of garment factories to recruit the workforce necessary to upgrade their production processes, as they will need to do if they are to maintain their international market share in a changing trading environment.

The maturing of the industrial sector in developing countries is likely to involve higher technology and higher wages. How far will such a path of industrial accumulation be able to retain the mass of rural, predominantly female, migrants who have been absorbed into export-oriented manufacturing? Some observers fear that the "high-tech" road to industrialization — with high wages, skilled workforce, good working conditions — even if it could be constructed, would probably only include better-off men (Hart, 1995). The debate on the de-skilling or upgrading effects of modern technology continues, but one of the trends that seems to be supported by the available evidence is that of skill polarization, with some workers acquiring the training necessary to work with new technologies, and others relegated to residual low-skill employment (Standing, 1989).

There is some evidence to suggest that technological and skill upgrading of export production, especially multi-skilling of flexible labour engaged in high-performance production, can lead to a process of de-feminization of manufacturing labour, since women seem to be disadvantaged in the processes of production that are capital intensive and that rely on skilled labour.<sup>5</sup> The fall in the share of women in the manufacturing labour force of Mexico's export border zone (*maquiladora*) between 1982 and 1985, was attributed to product diversification, elimination of low-skill operator jobs held by women, the need for higher levels of training, as well as trends towards certification and experiments with new work schedules (Beneria, 1995; Pearson, 1991a). Evidence from countries such as Singapore also suggests that with product diversification the proportion of women employed falls markedly, and a cross-country study of export

processing zones hypothesizes that the fall in the share of women workers is a general phenomenon (Joekes, 1995). In other words, as the mix of products produced for export markets is diversified beyond the relatively labour-intensive and low-technology ones (such as garments and footwear) in the process of product upgrading and deepening of the employment structure through investments in technology and skills, the share of women workers tends to fall. In the case of Singapore, the swing back from female intensity in manufacturing has been attributed, as a proximate cause, to the fact that women workers with the requisite qualifications are not available for recruitment to technical and other skilled grades, because few women have had access to the necessary technical education and training (Joekes, 1995).

The educational qualifications of the female workforce in the export-oriented manufacturing sector vary widely from country to country, over time and across industries. Lim (1990: 107) reports seeing “similar tasks in multinational electronics factories being performed by primary school dropouts in Singapore, where labour is scarce, and by high school graduates and even part-time college students in the Philippines, where unemployment rates are high.” However, within the same country, the education level tends to be higher in the electronic industries compared to the clothing/garment industries. Elson (1996) makes a useful point in this connection. She argues that organizations of and for women workers should be concerned with “enhancing the skills and education of those workers, so that if workers lose their jobs, they have acquired something of permanence — more self-confidence, more organizational and advocacy skills, more knowledge of how their society works” (1996:50). The comments of one Malaysian woman worker (from an electronics factory) who was retrenched during the 1985 recession captures the problem succinctly:

*After eleven years of working, I realize that I have learnt nothing that is of any use to me. The government has told me to find another job, not to be choosy. How can I be choosy? I have nothing anyone wants. (cited in Lohead, 1988:288)*

The female intensive industries in both Bangladesh and Morocco will almost certainly face extensive restructuring over the next few years. Bangladesh is due to lose the advantage in garment production it has enjoyed under the Multi-Fibre Agreement, which imposed production quotas on neighbouring countries and thus drove production to Bangladesh, and which will be phased out by 2005. Labour in Bangladesh, while cheaper than in neighbouring countries,

is also less productive, and Battacharya and Rahman argue that, unless the industry can adopt more efficient, higher technology production methods, reduction in market share and subsequent job losses are likely to be substantial. As in other countries, there are some early signs that the rate at which women have been participating in garment manufacturing may not be sustainable as export manufacturing diversifies; currently in the fastest growing subsectors, such as knitwear and hosiery, women constitute no more than 4 per cent of the labour force. It will take, according to Battacharya and Rahman, deliberate policies designed to dismantle the gender segmentation of the labour market, as well as a conscious effort to train the female labour force, to retain a significant share of future manufacturing employment for women.

In Morocco, the textile/garment sector has been facing declining international competitiveness in recent years due to several factors, among them stagnation in productivity growth. The research team suggests that, if Morocco is to overcome the current stagnation in its international competitiveness, alternative industrial models must be explored — as some entrepreneurs in the garment industry have already begun to do. Such models would improve product quality by retaining the best women workers, reducing labour turnover, and providing more scope for worker responsibility and participation through trade unions and other organizational forms. In other words, as Belghazi and Baden argue, a low-wage export strategy based on the use of female labour, subject to discriminatory forces, is no longer viable. The common explanation that Moroccan wages are “too high” relative to those in competitor countries is thus rejected. Instead, it is argued that wages should be understood not as a component of production costs, but as a factor that influences production methods and factor use, and thus that the variable to be addressed in restructuring is not labour costs but labour productivity.

The challenge in Morocco, as in many other countries, would be to make the transition to higher wage, higher productivity employment without substituting male workers, and more socially privileged female workers, for the existing female workforce drawn from lower income households. The training of the existing workforce, and improvement in methods for the valorization of the skills and experience of current workers, seem to be important aspects of the production upgrading process. The role of public policy is critical too in providing accessible training programmes. Training and education issues thus deserve imaginative policy responses, notwithstanding the inertia of the education system and the general crisis of resources for social development.

## IV. The case studies

The chapters in this volume open with an investigation of wage discrimination in Morocco's urban labour force. **Belghazi with Baden** provide data on female labour force participation and wage rates in export manufacturing, and they discuss theoretical explanations for wage discrimination by gender. Based on macro-level data, they provide a preliminary analysis of the contribution of different factors in explaining wage differentials. Clearly, more empirical work is needed to fully quantify and understand wage differentials, but it is interesting to note that education is neither valued nor rewarded in the female manufacturing labour force (women's wages neither rise significantly with higher levels of education, nor suffer from lack of education). The chapter then turns to a discussion of the implications of gender discrimination in the manufacturing sector. It advances the hypothesis that, contrary to the general perception that low wages are the necessary result of low productivity, low wages (including gender discrimination in wages) should be seen as a primary cause of low productivity and declining competitiveness in Morocco's industrial sector. Low returns to employment result in low commitment to employment, which, combined with lack of returns to education, means that the female labour force is largely unskilled and unproductive. A great deal more empirical work in different contexts needs to be done to determine whether this hypothesis is sustainable in Morocco and in other contexts, but the question is essential to raise and to examine because of its crucial policy implications.

The chapter by **Bourqia** follows by examining on a more micro level the forces through which gender discrimination works in Moroccan industrial employment, as well as its implications. Women in Morocco have worked in manufacturing since colonial times, and most female industrial workers are unmarried and live with their parents near their place of employment. It is common for parents to seek employment for their daughters, and to exert control over all of their earnings. Young women are the preferred labourers in textile work because of their docility and flexibility. Education is not valued by factory heads, and while experience does lead to increased wages, factory heads make little effort to stem the very high labour turnover rates. In general, this chapter tends to support Belghazi and Baden's contention that low wages result in low productivity. The low wages paid in textile work contribute to a perception that such work is low status, which in turn leads to a low commitment to employment and

a lack of incentive to improve skills. The women workers interviewed by Bourqia justify their high rates of absenteeism and tardiness on the basis of their low wages. Indeed, based on the findings of this case study, one might go even further than did Belghazi and Baden in linking gender discrimination to low productivity: not only might wage discrimination depress productivity, but so might social discrimination. The lack of control that female factory workers had over the terms of their employment, as well as over their earnings, meant that employment held very few personal rewards for them and they had few incentives to improve their skills or work performance.

The chapter by Afsar sketches the conditions for women in the garment sector in Bangladesh. In contrast to Morocco, there was a sudden and rapid boom in garment manufacturing in the 1980s, when women were drawn into the wage labour force in large numbers, with the vast majority of them being drawn from rural areas. This sudden influx of women workers had a much greater social impact than did the slowly growing textile sector in Morocco. Young women often left their parents to join the workforce, and quickly gained a measure of independence and mobility not possible in their rural homes. Employment for some represented a means of escape from family conflicts or unsatisfactory marriages. The relatively high wages that were possible meant that employment did not necessarily represent a distress sale of labour, but that jobs were often sought as a means to obtain funds for education and for investment. With growing numbers of girls from "good families" seeking employment, wage labour was increasingly seen as a socially acceptable, and even desirable experience for young women. Within the workplace, women sought career advancement, and bargained for higher wages.

Kibria delves even more deeply into the subjective experience of female garment workers in Bangladesh, providing a closer look at the process through which women become garment workers and at their perception of employment. She finds that garment workers are socially and economically more diverse than rural female labourers. For most who had previously held employment in other sectors, garment work represents upward mobility. Many had personal motives for seeking employment, including a desire to gain experience and independence. Garment workers' earnings tend to be largely under their own control, with sending families not relying on remittances from them — on the contrary, sending families often cover workers' initial expenses for establishing themselves in the city.

Afsar's and Kibria's work suggests that Bangladeshi women's

experience in garment work is largely positive, relative to the alternatives available to them. **Khan**, looking at the conditions in Bangladeshi garment factories from a more global perspective, paints a somewhat different picture. He reports that working hours in the factory are extremely long, with overtime often required and few holidays. Management makes deliberate efforts to keep employment conditions as informal as possible. Factory owners seek young female workers from rural areas because they have low aspiration wages, they are docile, and they are easy to dismiss. Attempts to organize garment workers have met with little success: only between 3 and 5 per cent of factories have active unions. Labour organizers must confront not only hostile and often brutal management, but also inefficient or corrupt labour boards. Khan's assessment of this situation is largely consistent with Belghazi and Baden's analysis of the effects of wage discrimination in Morocco: Khan argues that opposition to labour organization and improved labour standards in the garment sector in Bangladesh will decrease the potential for productivity gains in the sector. Improved working conditions would be expected to reduce labour turnover and consequently increase the experience of the workforce, making the training schemes necessary for upgrading skills much less risky for employers. In addition, Khan provides evidence from other countries to suggest that unionization tends to reduce the gender gap in wages, which will also help to increase women's commitment to the workforce and the returns to training.

**Battacharya and Rahman** return to more macro-level data to assess the prospects for garment manufacturing in Bangladesh, and for female workers in this sector. This chapter provides a somewhat different interpretation of the low-wage, low-productivity dynamic than that offered by Belghazi and Baden. The authors argue that, in Bangladesh, existing low levels of productivity were offset by low wages, and it is this that allowed the large scale influx of women workers into the manufacturing sector, and indeed provided a comparative advantage to women workers. However, Battacharya and Rahman agree that low productivity will become a serious constraint on the garment industry in the coming years. It will be necessary for the sector to improve production technology, and for women to develop the skills necessary to employ such technology. However, women are not currently in a position to take advantage of improved technology, as it is concentrated in the parts of the production process with little female employment. Thus there is a very real danger that women will be marginalized if Bangladesh

succeeds in restructuring its garment industry to become more competitive. The most important policy implication of this finding is that ways must be found to share the costs of technological training for women: because of the high labour turnover in the sector, employers will be reluctant to provide such training.

These chapters suggest a number of factors that have led to the differing experiences of female textile workers in Bangladesh and Morocco. In Bangladesh, rapid female-dominated, export-led industrialization has rent the social fabric in many areas, opening up possibilities for women unimaginable even 20 years ago. Due in part to the fact that women were recruited in large scale from rural areas, they were able to move into new social spheres and to exert considerable control over their income, in the process making many existing social institutions obsolete. This is not to say that conditions in the garment factories are good by global standards; in this case, women's long-term strategic gender interests may well be better met than are their short-term material interests. However, the progress women have made in the labour market in Bangladesh may easily be reversed if the garment sector does not find a way to become more competitive in the opening global markets.

In Morocco, on the other hand, the slower growth of the industry has meant that female textile workers were recruited largely from among the pre-existing female labour force. This labour force, which evolved out of a traditional carpet-weaving sector, remains largely under parental or spousal control, and provides few material or personal returns to the workers themselves. The ambivalence that Moroccan women expressed toward factory employment is due to this lack of returns, as well as to prevailing norms and attitudes that attach little value to women's paid employment.

These chapters further suggest that the emphasis on trade liberalization as a vehicle for increased women's labour force participation is somewhat misguided. It may be that what matters, for the women concerned, is less the terms of their country's incorporation into global markets, than the terms of women's incorporation into the labour market. Although export-oriented industrialization often improves labour market terms for women, this is not always the case. And indeed, in Bangladesh, the growth of female employment in the garment sector is largely the result of the sector's protection in global markets.

## V. Conclusion

Although gender issues are not extensively explored in the neo-classical discussion of trade liberalization and macro-policy prescriptions, the overall thrust of the argument seems to be that trade liberalization will deliver considerable benefits to women, both in terms of the sheer quantity of employment it can offer them and also in terms of employment conditions — i.e., in reducing gender wage discrimination. A contextualized analysis of labour force feminization, we have argued, provides a more qualified picture, mapping both the *uneven* “gendered landscape of the new international division of labour”<sup>6</sup> across time and place, as well as the *contradictory* implications of “inclusion” for those specific groups of women who have been incorporated into these new forms of work.

The empirical literature suggests that the ability to create successful export-oriented manufacturing has been geographically uneven; and it has not been sustainable in all contexts. The argument that export-oriented industries provide higher wages to women, and exhibit lower levels of wage discrimination raises further questions: do the lower levels of wage discrimination in the export-oriented industries signify that men’s wages are lower there? How significant are the wage discrimination data, when the export-oriented sectors are predominantly female? A meaningful assessment of what these jobs have meant for women would have to include not only wage data, but also some indication of the qualitative changes it has generated in their lives, in terms of life-long earning prospects, bodily well-being, changing social relationships (with parents, siblings, husbands, co-workers), and issues around dignity, autonomy and self-worth.

Institutionalist analyses have been useful for understanding how labour markets can become “bearers of gender”, i.e. how gender-based hierarchies are substantiated through labour market institutions. Institutional accounts, however, have not been sufficiently attentive to women workers’ understanding of their work, its implications for their personal lives, and “everyday” forms of resistance on the shop-floor. The more situated feminist accounts, which have complemented structural analyses of labour market institutions with the perceptions and accounts of women workers themselves, have shown how the response to the wage contract is contextually specific and gendered.

As Fraser (1997) puts it, the moral is that the wage contract requires looking beyond the boss/worker dyad. At the very least one must see the trade-off between subordination in paid employment

against the potential for relative freedom from subordination outside it.

The free mobility of capital, the downward spiral of labour conditions, and political decisions by states and employers to eschew responsibility for workers' well-being are clearly important concerns for large numbers of men and women. But political responses and the search for coalescing strategies will most probably be shaped at the juncture of three sets of issues: 1) despite being problematic, there is a need to maintain these jobs, and very few women would like to see their jobs disappear, 2) the high-wage/high-tech road may be an option available to only a few countries and may be open to a limited number of men (and even fewer women), 3) the agenda for social and gender-equitable development needs to be widened to include the conditions for social reproduction that can effectively subsidize the social wage — this is an area that needs to be explored creatively from a gender perspective. The political processes to drive this agenda include national and international acts of solidarity, but in either context the extent to which the interests of women workers can be genuinely represented will depend critically on their politicized presence in those movements.

Elson (1996) makes the important point that the observed processes associated with global feminization are not intrinsically interlinked: the flexibility of production made possible by technological changes does not have to be associated with the erosion of workers' rights made possible by the unfettered mobility of capital, or with political decisions by states and employers to eschew responsibility for workers' well-being. She also makes the critical observation, from a gender perspective, that male norms of full-time employment may not necessarily be the desirable norm to which all workers do and should aspire. Similarly, the message that may be drawn from women's experiences with trade unions at the national level is that the obvious workers' priorities may be, in fact, implicit male priorities.

Furthermore, as Battacharya and Rahman argue, even where access to wage employment is of immediate advantage to women, there is a need to look beyond such short-term advantages to longer-term strategic gender interests. These will include continued access to employment and enhanced gender equity in the labour market. Access to employment will entail first, that these manufacturing sectors remain competitive in world markets, and second, that women not be displaced by men in the restructuring process. Continued competitiveness will require increased productivity through

improved technology. The studies in this volume clearly suggest that gender discrimination is an impediment to increased productivity, because of employers' reluctance to provide training for women, or to improve working conditions in order to reduce labour turnover, which in turn is necessary for training and the adoption of new technologies.

Much of the problem here, of course, is that traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes, in the short term, tend to be reproduced rather than transformed by factory work. Employers often have the attitude that women are not committed to the labour force, and that they are not capable of benefiting from technological training. Thus, while macroeconomic and trade policy changes may have stimulated export-oriented industrialization and the emergence of new forms of employment for women, the significant interventions that will have to be made in order to enable women to secure labour market entitlements are not achievable through the manipulation of such macroeconomic tools. Exchange rate and interest rate changes may affect the performance of the industrial sector as a whole, but they are too blunt to influence women's access to employment or gender equity within the labour market. Instead, these social objectives will have to be addressed through a wide range of micro-policy instruments, which will necessarily vary under different conditions, and which may include such disparate measures as improved street lighting or transportation, affordable housing facilities, accessible training programmes, childcare facilities or health insurance schemes. The labour market interventions needed in the context of the restructuring of export-oriented industry are essentially aimed at making both public authorities and the private sector more accountable for the social costs of production — i.e. making them more “socially responsible” — thereby enabling women workers to enhance their capabilities (in terms of health, skills, decision-making power) and to obtain more sustainable labour market entitlements.

## Endnotes

1. Sections of this chapter draw on Razavi (1999).
2. See Cagatay and Ozler (1995), Joekees and Weston (1994), Joekees (1995), and Standing (1989).
3. While there is an extensive literature on the health hazards of new technology in developed countries — documenting muscular-skeletal disorders, eyesight injuries, stress and fatigue, skin complaints and reproductive hazards — very little research has been undertaken to monitor the health implications of working with new technology in developing countries (Pearson, 1991b).
4. Belghazi's analysis of Moroccan employment and wage data, for example, suggests that there is strong selectivity in participation by educational level. The female urban labour force in Morocco is on average better educated than the male, despite a significant gender gap in education even in urban areas (this volume).
5. See Elson (1996) for evidence of such reversals in some developed countries (e.g. electronics plants in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, and textile manufacturing in the United Kingdom).
6. This phrase is borrowed from Pearson (1998).

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