

Women's Employment in the Textile Manufacturing Sectors of Bangladesh and Morocco

edited by Carol Miller
and Jessica Vivian

United Nations
Research Institute
for Social Development



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Acknowledgements

Many people have been involved in the process that led to the publication of this book. The editors would like to acknowledge their contribution at various stages. Ingrid Palmer developed the original Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives action research programme (1992-1998) which was funded by UNDP and implemented by UNRISD. From 1993 the programme was co-ordinated by Shahra Ravazi. The aim of the programme was to facilitate research and dialogue among national level gender researchers, economists, civil society organizations and policy makers on the gender dimensions of key macroeconomic policy concerns. A series of national workshops were held in the programme countries to establish priorities for the research programme. Women's employment in the context of trade liberalization and labour deregulation was selected by two of the five countries involved in the programme as their critical area of research. The chapters that appear in this volume present the findings of the research programme.

The national research team in Bangladesh included Rita Afsar, Debapriya Bhattacharya, Samsul Khan, Nasreen Khundker (leader), Nazli Kibria, Simeen Mahmud and Mustafizur Rahman. In Morocco, the team included Hajji Abderrahim, Saad Belghazi, Rahma Bourqia, and Rabea Naciri (leader). Special thanks are due to Susan Joeke who provided advice and support throughout the implementation of the research programme. Yusuf Bangura, Krishna Ghimire, Dharam Ghai, Swasti Mitter and David Westendorff provided comments on the chapters at various stages. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of Vicky Bawtree in translating Rahma Bourqia's paper from the original French, and to thank Françoise Jaffré for copy-editing and designing the final publication.

Carol Miller, Jessica Vivian

Foreword

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. The objective was to facilitate a substantive dialogue between gender researchers, economists and policy makers, and to encourage the involvement of national research teams and civil society organizations in national policy debates. 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 book is based on the research carried out by national research teams in those two countries.

The current emphasis on trade liberalization and economic restructuring will affect many countries that have a large female workforce in labour-intensive industries. Given the limits imposed on productivity by 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 to compete in the new labour force.

The challenge in both Bangladesh and Morocco, as in many other countries, is to make the transition from a low-wage, low-productivity strategy to higher wage, higher productivity employment without substituting male workers, and more socially privileged female workers, for the existing female workforce that is drawn from lower income households. The training of the existing workforce, and methods of valorizing the skills and experience of current workers, seem to be important aspects of the production upgrading process. The role of public policy is going to be critical in this context. 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 that pose significant policy challenges. At the same time, there are clear limits to employment generation through export-oriented strategies. As the introductory chapter reminds us, the ability to develop successful export-oriented manufacturing has been geographically patchy and uneven, and in many cases it has not been sustainable.

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Current emphasis on trade liberalization and economic restructuring will affect many countries that have a large female workforce in labour-intensive industries. Given the limits imposed on productivity by low-skill, labour-intensive strategies, increasing competitiveness must come in large part from technological upgrading and increasing labour productivity. The challenge in Bangladesh and Morocco, as in many other countries, is 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 that is drawn from lower income households. The role of public policy is going to be critical in this context.

Thandika Mkandawire, UNRISD
Stephen Browne, UNDP

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous agency engaging in multidisciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

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