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# Gendered Impacts of Globalization

## *Employment and Social Protection*

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### **OVERVIEW**

UNRISD Research Paper 2012–3i

March 2012

This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Programme Paper has been produced with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). UNRISD also thanks the governments of Denmark, Finland, Mexico, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom for their core funding.. UNRISD also thanks the governments of Denmark, Finland, Mexico, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom for their core funding.

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ISSN 2305-5375

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## Acronyms

<b>CCT</b>	Conditional cash transfer
<b>CGT</b>	Confederación General del Trabajo ( <i>Trade union confederation</i> )
<b>Dfid</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>ETI</b>	Ethical Trading Initiative
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign direct investment
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Office
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NREGP</b>	National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme
<b>NTAE</b>	Non-traditional agricultural export crops
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>SEWA</b>	Self-Employed Women's Association
<b>SOE</b>	State-owned enterprise
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UNRISD</b>	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

This paper was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (Dfid) as an independent piece of research with the aim of feeding into the *2012 World Development Report* on gender equality, and informing Dfid's own programming.

It examines how globalization affects gendered access to employment and social protection, with a particular focus on informal employment, and the implications of these connections for policy and practice. For its evidence base, the paper draws on an extensive body of literature, including some of UNRISD's own commissioned research. In addition, two review papers were specifically commissioned as inputs, one on macroeconomic policies and their implications for gender equality (Braunstein 2012) and the other on the gender implications of pension reform in Latin America (Arza 2012). Two shorter literature reviews, on public employment programmes and on informal workers' organizations, were prepared in-house (Goulding 2011a, 2011b). We are grateful to Megan Gerecke (independent consultant) for bringing together data sources and compiling many of the figures and tables, and to Peroline Ainsworth (independent consultant) for her work on the overview.

Useful comments on earlier drafts were provided by Debbie Budlender, Liz Fajber and her team, Peter Utting, and two anonymous referees. The present version reflects the collective work of the UNRISD team.



## **Executive Summary**

### ***Introduction***

The last three decades have seen remarkable changes in economic structures and policies both within and across countries, loosely captured by the term globalization. This paper reviews evidence on how key aspects of globalization processes have impacted the real economy, in terms of employment and social conditions of work for women and men across a wide range of countries.

### ***Trends in women's employment***

Globalization has coincided with a global increase in female labour force participation rates which has narrowed the gender gap from 32 to 26 percentage points. A number of factors associated with globalization processes have contributed to this increase, including the growth of production for export in the developing world. With labour costs such a crucial part of international competitiveness, labour-intensive exporters have shown a preference for women workers because their wages are typically lower than men's and because women are perceived as more productive in these types of jobs.

The narrowing of the gender gap in economic participation rates has not produced commensurate gender equality in pay and status. In fact, increasing female labour force participation has coincided with an increase in informal and unprotected forms of work. Jobs in export-oriented manufacturing firms and capitalist farms producing horticultural export crops have benefited some women, giving them their first discretionary income or a greater say in the allocation of household resources. However, even in the countries where production for export has created new forms of employment, occupational segregation has been maintained: the wages and conditions of work remain far from satisfactory for women who continue to be concentrated in temporary and seasonal jobs, while the few permanent jobs that are created are reserved for men.

### ***Constraints to improved labour market outcomes for women***

#### **Labour markets as gendered institutions**

Labour markets do not operate in a vacuum. As *social* institutions they are shaped by social norms and power inequalities. Women and men do not come to the market with the same resources, be it working capital, labour (of others), social contacts and different types of skills and experiences. These differences are themselves often the outcomes of gender-based barriers and inequalities.

Both the formal rules and the informal practices that structure the operation of labour markets often reflect the gender norms of the societies in which they are embedded. Women and men tend to have access to, or are deemed appropriate for, different kinds of jobs. Payment and promotion systems, no matter how well codified, always have scope for discretion. The cultural acceptability of paid work—especially outside the home—the varying effects of women's life course and the status of their households all affect women's experiences of paid work. Women are also more likely than men to experience constraints on how they dispose of their earnings, and more likely to be restricted in their labour market activities by their socially ascribed responsibilities for unpaid domestic and care work. Hence, women's increased participation in the labour force is not a straightforward story of progress in gender equality. Moreover, many of the factors that structure labour markets and women's position within them are in turn shaped by broader policies and processes of social change.

### ***Policies associated with globalization***

Patterns of economic growth differ in their ability to generate employment of sufficient quantity and quality. This, in turn, shapes women's (as well as men's) prospects of finding work that provides good terms and conditions. There are concerns that macroeconomic policies that have been dominant over the past three decades have performed poorly in terms of generating sufficient employment that is of decent quality, that is, governed by statutory labour market regulations and/or basic legal and social protections.

**Financial liberalization:** Neoliberal monetary policies have emphasized the opening up of capital markets to external flows and keeping inflation rates low. Financial volatility and crisis in developing countries have had significant effects on the real economy, not only income decline, but also include lower employment, increasing unemployment and underemployment, and apparent shifts of workers from formal to informal labour relations. Recurring economic crises associated with financial liberalization have propelled many women into the labour force, and often into the more precarious forms of work.

**Inflation targeting:** Other key elements of the currently dominant "market friendly" monetary regime include the maintenance of price stability and low inflation rates. While very high rates of inflation (above 20 per cent) are harmful for everyone, there is little evidence to justify very low rates of inflation when these restrictive policies adversely impact employment. Emerging evidence suggests that inflation reduction episodes can have a disproportionately negative impact on women's employment: women lose more employment in percentage terms than men when employment contracts, but women do not gain employment faster than men in the fewer cases where employment expands during inflation reduction episodes.

**Trade liberalization:** Although creating employment opportunities for women in some contexts, trade liberalization has also generated adverse impacts on employment in sectors that have to compete with cheap imports. In most countries the expansion of employment in export-oriented sectors has been more than offset by decline in other sectors of manufacturing that have been hit by import competition. The effect of trade liberalization on growth and employment is contingent on a number of specific policy, country and industry circumstances, including, most importantly, the manner in which policy restrictions on imports can limit the potentially negative effects of import penetration. In addition, the increase in the number of countries expanding their exports of labour-intensive manufacturing commodities has contributed to driving down the relative prices ("terms of trade") of those goods on the global market. This has constrained the types of improvements in wages and working conditions that could have been made. This dynamic is especially damaging for women who tend to be concentrated in the types of industries that are most exposed to international competition. In countries where manufacturing industries have upgraded their products to escape the adverse terms of trade, it has been difficult for women to maintain their jobs. In the Republic of Korea and Taiwan Province of China, for example, the shift to more sophisticated electronics industries has led to a "de-feminization" of the manufacturing sector.

**Public sector reforms:** Down-sizing and privatizing of the public sector has had adverse implications for women who constitute a significant share of public sector workers in many countries (usually higher than their overall share of the work force). Moreover, public sector employment is significant for women because it makes up a larger share of women's formal employment than men's, and because it sets the floor for wages and improves the bargaining power of workers in other contexts.

Mechanisms underpinning the growth of casual and informal employment are therefore likely to have their origins in the structural trends and policies associated with globalization: the idea that labour market informality has grown as a response to government over-regulation does not stand up to scrutiny given the fact that informality has increased at a time when pro-labour statutory regulation has weakened in most countries.



### ***Policies and practices to improve labour market outcomes for women***

**Social protection** policies and programmes aim to address workers' living standards and economic security. Access to social protection mechanisms such as insurance for health and maternity has been high on the agenda of trade unions and women's organizations. However, the way in which some social protection measures are designed and implemented can obstruct women's access to them. This is especially the case with social insurance type of programmes that are closely tied to formal employment: by assuming full-time, formal, life-long employment as the norm, such programmes implicitly discriminate against women. It is possible, however, to make social insurance programmes more inclusive of women (who may be self-employed) by making affiliation mandatory and by partially subsidizing their contributions. Pension programmes can also be made more inclusive by creating or strengthening a government-financed solidarity pillar to enhance the pensions of workers with some contributions but low pensions, as well as through non-contributory social assistance pensions.

Improvements in social insurance design and financing need to be accompanied by efforts to strengthen labour market regulations and social provisions to create a more level playing field for women within labour markets. This includes labour market regulations, for example on minimum wage or elimination of discriminatory wages. It also includes putting in place proactive social provisions such as good quality and accessible care services that can give women the option of engaging in paid work.

Social assistance programmes such as cash transfer schemes targeted to women (on behalf of their children), which have extended their reach in many countries and attracted policy interest in recent years, can be another useful component of a social protection strategy. While cash transfers can enhance children's access to public services, the quality of those services needs improvement through adequate state funding and regulation. There are also concerns about the conditionalities that are attached to some schemes that require unpaid work from time-pressed mothers. Most importantly, social assistance programmes such as cash transfer schemes should be seen as one component of a much broader set of social protection instruments. The larger question is what specific importance to give to this single policy instrument in an overall strategy of development and gender equality.

### ***Toward a broader development agenda that enhances gender equality***

The orthodox policy approach of tight monetary and fiscal policies, and free trade and capital flows, has not proved to be conducive for either widespread development or extensive improvements in well-being and gender equality. There is growing support for alternative macroeconomic policies that, while aiming for macroeconomic stability, take more heed of development and social goals. This would have to include monetary and fiscal policies that are more expansionary, taxation policies that provide governments with adequate revenues to fund social expenditures. If economic growth is to be broadly shared, it is necessary to introduce a set of labour market policies and related interventions that can affect working conditions in diverse employment situations. These should not only enhance the capabilities of workers to capture some of the productivity gains that are now siphoned off into profits, but also rectify gender imbalances and discriminatory practices. Second, if gender inequalities in labour markets are to be rectified, society as a whole has to seek specific means of both progressing toward a better balance between the provision of unpaid reproductive work and paid labour, and facilitating greater gender equality in both domains. For many developing countries, attaining gender equality requires strengthening publicly accountable systems of mutual assurance against entitlement failure. This means investing in well-functioning and accessible public health, education and care services that can also become a source of decent employment; broad-based and redistributive social insurance programmes; and public provision of a range of complementary goods and services such as clean water, subsidized food items, sanitation, electricity, transport and housing.

## Overview

The paper summarized here was commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (Dfid) to analyse:

- how globalization affects access to employment and employment outcomes by gender;
- the constraints to improved economic and social outcomes for women;
- the effectiveness and limitations of policies and practices designed to overcome constraints and improve women's labour market outcomes, and
- identify evidence gaps and critical issues for further research, and key recommendations for policy and practice.

It reviews available evidence on the interconnections between policies associated with globalization on the one hand, and gender structures within labour markets and systems of social protection, on the other.

*Processes of globalization have coincided with women's increasing labour force participation, with empowering consequences for some. This increase is in part a result of the creation of new employment opportunities in production for export following the liberalization of international trade as part of the globalization agenda. However, the increasing participation of women in the labour force should not be read as a straightforward story of progress. Globalization policies have also produced adverse outcomes for significant numbers of women (and men). Crisis-induced disruptions to household income associated with financial liberalization, and job losses linked to competition from cheap imports and public sector reforms are pushing many women into low-paid temporary, seasonal and casual employment. As informal workers, many women have limited access to social protection measures. Structural conditions in global production chains where women workers are concentrated have made it difficult to see improvements in wages and working conditions. Moreover, labour markets remain highly segmented by gender throughout the world, and pay gaps between men and women, though reduced, are significant even in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Women continue to be primarily responsible for unpaid care and reproductive work, indispensable to the functioning of the "productive economy", despite doing more hours of paid work.*

## Introduction

Globalization refers to the deepening of international economic relations, which has accelerated since the 1980s, and is associated with greater economic liberalization both internationally and within national economies (Jomo 2003). This paper focuses on key aspects of these processes, which have had direct or indirect impacts on labour markets: the liberalization of trade and finance; deflationary monetary and fiscal policies; privatization of state-owned enterprises and the introduction of market principles in the public sector; and labour market liberalization. It reviews evidence on how these processes have impacted women differently from men and why. The paper draws heavily on research by feminist economists and social policy analysts published in leading academic journals, as well as global data sources and evaluations produced by relevant multilateral policy organizations (such as the International Labour Organization/ILO, World Bank and the OECD).

### Box I: A few definitions

*Employment* is usually defined as work in activities that produce goods and services that are valued and included in the system of national accounts—that is, those economic activities that are officially counted as part of an economy's gross domestic product (GDP). Such market-based exchanges can take many different forms and are not confined to situations where individuals exchange their labour directly for a salary or a wage. Those who are self-employed—whether farming their own land, working in a family-run enterprise or working as street vendors—engage in other forms of market transaction to realize the value of their labour. In practice, not all of these exchanges are consistently captured and counted in labour force surveys and calculations of GDP.

*Unpaid care and reproductive work*—crucial to the success of the productive economy—is not recognized in official labour market statistics nor is it counted as part of GDP. This paper, however, adopts a broad definition of work which includes unpaid domestic and care work.

*Formal employment* refers to work in activities that produce goods and services that are valued and included in the system of national accounts, and governed by statutory labour market regulations and/or basic legal and social protections.

*Informal employment* captures employment in unregulated jobs without any form of protection (such as job security or social security). This definition includes workers in informal enterprises, and workers without any form of social protection elsewhere in the economy, including within the formal sector.

*Unpaid care work* includes housework (meal preparation, cleaning) and care of persons (bathing a child, watching over a frail elderly person) carried out in homes and communities. Such work contributes to well-being and feeds into economic growth through the reproduction of a labour force that is fit, productive and capable of learning and creativity. Women perform the bulk of unpaid domestic and care work across all economies and cultures. Despite its economic value, unpaid domestic and care work is not included in labour force surveys. Nor is it brought into the calculation of GDP. It is therefore invisible in representations of the economy that inform policy making.

### *Globalization and its gendered employment outcomes: Some facts*

*Processes of globalization have coincided with a global increase in female labour force participation rates; this is in part due to the growing significance of international trade.*

Female labour force participation across the world increased from 50.2 per cent in 1980 to 51.7 per cent in 2008, despite declines in Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia. As a result, the gender gap in labour force participation rates narrowed from 32 to 26 percentage points (ILO 2010a).

In most advanced industrialized countries, the gap between male and female labour force participation rates has narrowed in the last 30 years. Significant variations in women's labour force participation remain, however, with high rates of around 60 per cent in Nordic countries and relatively low rates of around 40 per cent in Southern Europe. Latin America, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan Africa have also seen relative increases in women's labour force participation rates, though some regions, notably MENA, started from a very low base.

A number of factors have contributed to the increase in women's labour force participation rates. The tremendous growth in manufacturing trade and export processing from the developing world underlies the nearly universal increase in women's share of the nonagricultural labour force among high growth or semi-industrialized developing economies in the past few decades.<sup>1</sup> Increases in women's employment have also occurred among producers of non-traditional agricultural export crops (NTAE), such as designer fruits and vegetables or cut flowers, in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa and Central America (Dolan and Sorby 2003), as well as in countries engaged in the more traditionally feminine aspects of the services trade, such as data entry. The relative increase in demand for female labour is not just a matter of expanding the available labour force when male labour is in short supply. With labour costs such a crucial part of international competitiveness in these industries, labour intensive exporters prefer to hire women because women's wages are typically lower than men's, and because employers perceive women as more productive in these types of jobs (Elson and Pearson 1981).

<sup>1</sup> Berik and Rodgers 2009; Standing 1999; UN 1999.

***For some women participation in the labour market has represented a pathway for empowerment.***

In addition to the growing demand for female labour, other factors, such as the rising levels of female education, falling fertility rates and changing aspirations, have also contributed to the growing tendency by women to seek paid work (UNRISD 2005). In some contexts, such as the garment industry in Bangladesh, increased production for export markets has offered employment opportunities for women previously confined to home-based forms of economic activity (Kabeer 1995). In other contexts, for example horticultural production in Uganda, wage work in flower plantations has provided one of the few sources of off-farm employment (and income) to women, even though the wages may be low relative to their cost of living and compared to what managers on the same farms earn (UWEA 2011). However, increased participation of women in the labour force is not a straightforward story of progress.

***Economic crises, sometimes associated with financial liberalization, have pushed significant numbers of women to look for work on unfavourable terms.***

There is evidence that many women are propelled into the labour market at times of economic distress to make up for falling earnings of other household members, especially male breadwinners. Many of these women take up low-paid casual employment. This has been the case in Latin American countries such as Mexico and Argentina, which have endured recurrent economic crises since the early 1980s, and partly explains the large increase in female labour force participation in that region since 1980 (Cerrutti 2000; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1988). Similarly in post-apartheid South Africa, unemployment among men seems to have led to greater labour force participation among women (Casale 2003, cited in Heintz and Lund 2011). Studies of women wage workers in the NTAE sector in Latin America have also found increasing numbers of women joining the highly mobile seasonal workers in the context of increasing landlessness and livelihood insecurity (Deere 2005).

Economic pressures have also pushed many women (some of them highly educated and qualified) to migrate to find work, sometimes leaving their own children behind in order to take care of children and the elderly in richer countries. Women—both high-skilled and “unskilled”—constitute an increasing proportion of cross-border labour flows (Piper 2008). Such strategies in response to economic distress have become more common with the increasing frequency of financial and economic crises in recent decades.

***More women are entering the work force, but occupational segregation and pay gaps between men and women remain high.***

Despite some improvements in the 1990s, levels of gender segregation<sup>2</sup> in the labour market remain significant throughout the world (Anker et al. 2003). The average shortfall of women’s earnings compared to men’s was 22.9 per cent during the period 2008–2009, an improvement on the 26.2 per cent gap observed in 1995. Nonetheless at the current pace of progress it would take more than 75 years to reach “equal remuneration for work of equal value” (ILO 2011a:15).

In OECD countries, women are still more likely to be in part-time employment. Moreover, across OECD countries median wages for men are higher than those for women even among full-time employees: in 2004 the average difference was 15 per cent (OECD 2005). In Latin America, women’s average income per hour in non-agricultural sectors increased from 68 per cent to 78 per cent of men’s between 1990 and 2000. In some Asian countries where the gap was wider, there has also been some narrowing, especially in Japan, Malaysia and the Republic of

<sup>2</sup> Occupational sex segregation refers to the separation of women and men into different occupations. This is “one of the most pernicious aspects of inequality in the labour market, since it is generally accompanied by lower pay and worse working conditions in female occupations” (Anker et al. 2003:1). A widely used index for measuring occupation segregation is called the index of dissimilarity.

Korea (henceforth South Korea). Despite this trend, men in these Asian countries still earn 40 per cent more than women (ILO 2007:8).

***Increasing female labour force participation has coincided with an increase in informal and unprotected forms of work.***

Over the past three decades tremendous changes have swept through labour markets throughout the world, adversely affecting the security of workers. The growth of informal employment, along with the casualization of formal sector employment, has allowed employers to lower labour costs and to sidestep social security obligations and labour laws. Thus the increase in women's access to paid work has not been associated with a corresponding increase in coverage of employment-related social protection instruments such as maternity leave, health insurance or unemployment insurance. Feminization has therefore happened in a double sense: not only have labour markets included more women, but the convergence between male and female rates of participation has been toward the type of employment patterns historically associated with women (such as insecure and precarious work) (Standing 1999; Beneria 2001).

Existing evidence suggests that in most regions of the world informal employment constitutes a larger proportion of women's total employment than it does of men's total employment.<sup>3</sup> In Brazil, for example, informal non-agricultural employment accounts for 50.3 per cent of women's employment compared to 40 per cent of men's, partly because of the large numbers of women employed as paid domestic workers. In India and Kenya, women dominate agricultural activities which are largely informal. In South Africa, informal non-agricultural employment accounts for 34 per cent of women's employment and 25.5 per cent of men's (Heintz 2008). Other data from South Africa show an increase in women's share of total employment since 1995; informal self-employment and employment as paid domestic workers account for much of this. Evidence from a wide range of countries in Latin America and Africa shows widespread and increasing recruitment of women as temporary contract workers on a seasonal or casual basis in the agricultural sector.<sup>4</sup>

***Women continue to be principally responsible for unpaid care and reproductive work despite doing more hours of paid work.***

Time use data show that in developed countries women spend significantly more time than men on cooking, cleaning and taking care of children (UNDP 2008). When market and non-market based work are taken together, women's total work time exceeds that of men in all but the Nordic countries. Emerging time use data from selected developing countries suggest that the mean time spent by women on unpaid domestic and care work is more than twice the mean time spent by men (Budlender 2008a). While women spend less time on paid work than men, they spend more time working if all types of work (paid and unpaid) are combined. This means less time for leisure, education, political participation and self-care. Women in low-income houses allocate more time to unpaid domestic and care work than women in higher income households, possibly because they cannot purchase care services or time-saving devices, have limited access to social infrastructure like drinking water, and live in larger households. A recent estimate based on six countries, most of them developing, showed that if such work were assigned a monetary value, it would constitute between 10 and 39 per cent of GDP (Budlender 2008a). This work is indispensable to the functioning of the "productive economy"; but labour markets operate in ways that fail to acknowledge the contributions of this "reproductive economy" (Elson 1999). In fact those with reproductive responsibilities are often penalized in terms of earnings and occupations.

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<sup>3</sup> ILO 2002; Chen et al. 2005; UNRISD 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Barrientos and Barrientos 2002; Dolan and Sorby 2003; Deere 2005.

***Barriers and constraints to improved labour market outcomes for women***

Why has the increasing demand for female labour not had a more positive impact on women's wages and other employment outcomes vis-à-vis men's, especially at a time when education gaps between women and men have narrowed?

Two key sets of obstacles are discussed: the characteristics of labour markets; and the gendered implications of policies associated with globalization.

**How labour markets work: Institutional characteristics and constraints**

In the neoclassical worldview labour markets, like any other market, are neutral arenas where buyers and sellers of labour interact. Gender discrimination is acknowledged to exist in labour markets if gender differences in earnings/wages cannot be "accounted for" by differences in education or on-the-job training (Elson 1999). According to this thinking, liberalizing labour markets and allowing greater competition among firms would reduce discrimination against women workers as employers come to realize the costs of discrimination. Likewise, increasing demand for female labour relative to male labour should, in theory, help reduce gender wage gaps.

Labour markets, however, do not operate in a vacuum. As *social* institutions they are shaped by social norms and power inequalities:

- i. women and men do not come to the market with the same material or social resources;
- ii. both formal rules and informal practices that structure the operation of labour markets are themselves often a reflection of gender relations in society within which markets are embedded; and
- iii. men and women have very different roles and relationships to the unpaid "reproductive sector" which shapes their access to labour markets.

Women tend to have less access to capital, contacts, labour and other resources than men and often come to the labour market with different types of skills and experiences. These differences are themselves very often the outcome of structural and discriminatory forces, such as fewer years of labour market experience due to care-related interruptions in paid work.

Both the formal rules and the informal practices that structure the operation of labour markets often reflect the gender norms of the societies in which they are embedded. Men and women therefore have access to (or are deemed appropriate for) different kinds of jobs. Payment and promotion systems, no matter how well codified, always have scope for discretion: performance-related payment systems, for example, seem to apply different criteria of good performance to women and men even within the same job. Occupations which are predominantly undertaken by women tend to have grading systems that compress jobs into a narrow range of grades offering fewer opportunities for promotion (Elson 1999). Furthermore, labour markets fail to acknowledge the contribution of unpaid reproductive work to the economy. For these reasons, gender based hierarchies and segmentations may persist even as the demand for female labour increases, and gaps in educational attainment shrink.

At the same time differences in the cultural acceptability of paid work, especially when it takes place outside the home, the varying effects of women's life course, and the status of their households shape women's experiences of paid work, whether formal or informal. Women are more likely than men to experience constraints on how they dispose of their earnings. Married women often make concessions in their private lives in return for permission to take up paid work: sometimes handing over wages to their husbands. Very often they put in long hours of unpaid work to ensure the fulfilment of what are defined as their primary responsibilities (Kabeer 2007). Paid work does not therefore automatically translate into greater decision-making power, control over own earnings, or a reduction in unpaid care responsibilities.



Women are also more likely to be constrained in their labour market activities by their socially ascribed responsibilities for reproductive work. Their employment may be interrupted or reduced, for example when children are very young or a family member is sick. They may have to take up work which offers more flexibility in terms of the physical location or timing of activities (such as informal industrial outwork) but which pays less well. Such constrained choices are likely to have adverse implications for earnings, work-related benefits and old age security.

### Globalization policies and their gendered consequences

A number of key policy areas are associated with the most recent phase of globalization. These include trade and financial liberalization, deflationary macroeconomic policies, fiscal restraint, privatization, the introduction of market principles (“quasi markets”) into the public sector and labour market liberalization. These do not represent an exhaustive list of the policy channels that link globalization to employment effects, but rather capture the main areas of research to date. Much more remains to be done and understood about this relationship. The analysis of these policies in terms of their gendered implications is also limited. However, existing research suggests ways in which such policies translate into differential outcomes in the areas of employment and social protection, in ways which often disadvantage women.

### *The costs of economic volatility and crisis resulting from financial liberalization are not equally shared.*

Financial liberalization is one of the most controversial aspects of globalization due to its association with economic volatility and crises.<sup>5</sup> These have negative effects on the real economy, particularly on incomes and employment, because they increase unemployment and underemployment, and because they can induce a shift of workers from more formal to relatively casualized and informal employment.

Economic crises may affect labour supply in two ways. They may discourage workers and push them out of the labour force completely, or they can induce households to add more workers to the labour market as protection against lower or more volatile household incomes. The added-worker effect dominates explanations of crisis-related increases in labour force participation in Latin America, much of it by women (Cerrutti 2000). Similar work on the gendered employment effects of the Asian financial crisis in 1997–1998, however, showed that in that context women were pushed out of the formal labour market. They were typically the first to be laid off both because they worked in more cyclically volatile firms, such as small export-oriented enterprises, and because of efforts to protect the jobs of “male breadwinners” (UN 1999). In South Korea, women lost jobs at twice the rate of men, despite the fact that before the crisis, their unemployment was half that of men’s (UN 1999).

Both these effects are linked to the shift of workers from formal to informal employment with new labour force entrants and workers who have lost jobs being absorbed into less formal, part-time or casual types of paid work. Women are especially likely to undertake such work in these circumstances. Following the economic crisis in South Korea, fixed-term, contingent, temporary agent and on-call workers grew from 16.6 per cent of total wage and salary employment in 2001 to 28.8 per cent in 2006; non-standard employment accounted for 40.3 per cent of women’s earnings compared to 24.1 per cent of men’s (Grubb et al. 2007). This represented a significant change in the structure of South Korea’s labour market.

The 2008 economic crisis began as a financial crisis in the developed world and reverberated out to developing economies, primarily as a negative trade shock. The substantial decline in export markets beginning in late 2008 reduced employment demand among developing country exporters. Preliminary reports link differences in women’s and men’s unemployment outcomes post-crisis with the industries in which they work, not with discriminatory or male breadwinner bias as in the Asian financial crisis (Hirway and Prabhu 2012; Otobe 2011). For

<sup>5</sup> Gabel 2011; Van der Hoeven and Lubker 2006; Ocampo 2005; Prasad et al. 2003.

instance, in Ukraine, where the metal processing export industries, which primarily employ men, were hit hard by the collapse in global demand, men's employment declined much more than women's. Conversely, higher proportions of women lost their jobs in Cambodia, Egypt, Mauritius, Morocco and the Philippines, largely because of job losses in the textile and clothing sectors, where women's employment is concentrated.<sup>6</sup> However, evidence on the gender differentiated outcomes of the 2008–2009 crisis remains fragmentary, and in need of more careful quantitative and qualitative assessment.

***Women are more likely than men to lose their jobs during periods of inflation reduction.***

In addition to open capital accounts (financial liberalization) discussed above, key elements of the currently dominant “market friendly” monetary regime include the maintenance of price stability and low inflation rates. While very high rates of inflation (above 20 per cent) are harmful for everyone—including workers whose wages will be eroded if they are not indexed to inflation—there is little evidence to justify maintaining very low rates of inflation (not just in the single digits, but very often less than five per cent), when these restrictive policies adversely impact employment. Inflation targeting, as with monetary policy more broadly, has both a social content and a social impact with distinctive “winners” and “losers” defined in terms of income group and gender. Emerging evidence suggests that inflation reduction episodes can have a disproportionately negative impact on women's employment: women lose more employment in percentage terms than men when employment contracts, but women do not gain employment faster than men in the fewer cases where employment expands during inflation reduction episodes (Braunstein and Heintz 2006). More research is needed to confirm this finding.

***Trade liberalization can have adverse impacts on employment in sectors that have to compete with cheap imports.***

Trade liberalization has received a relatively more positive assessment than financial liberalization because of the presumed employment gains for developing countries, and women in those countries in particular, given their disproportionate share of employment in export-oriented sectors. However, while the growth of the manufacturing sector for export has created employment opportunities for women in some contexts, the liberalization of trade has also engendered negative impacts on jobs in sectors that have to compete with cheap imports. The effect of trade liberalization on growth and employment is thus contingent on a number of specific policy, country, and industry circumstances, including the extent to which domestic production is shielded, through restrictions placed on imports, from the potentially negative effects of import penetration (Heintz 2006). In South Africa, for example, the positive employment effects associated with production for export have been almost entirely offset by the negative consequences of import penetration. This is in contrast to Vietnam and China, which maintained firm restrictions on imports during the rapid growth of their export sectors (Heintz 2006; Ghosh 2003).

In countries where trade liberalization has facilitated the growth of export-oriented NTAE and manufacturing industries, women have made up a significant share of the workforce: around 74 per cent in garments manufacturing, and between 60 and 80 per cent in NTAE. The ability to earn an independent wage may have facilitated personal paths of empowerment for some of these women workers. However, the structural conditions of these global production chains, marked by ever more competitive subcontracting arrangements, have made it very difficult for women workers to see improvements in their wages and working conditions, despite new forms of labour advocacy and regulation. In addition, the increase in the number of countries expanding their exports of (labour-intensive) manufacturing commodities has contributed to driving down the relative prices (“terms of trade”) of those goods on the global market. This has constrained the types of improvements in wages and working conditions that could have

<sup>6</sup> Otake 2011; Jansen and von Uexkull 2010; Pearson and Sweetman 2010.



been made (UNCTAD 2007). This dynamic is especially damaging for women who tend to be concentrated in the types of industries that are most exposed to international competition (Berik and Rodgers 2009).

In countries where manufacturing industries have up-graded their products (such as Mexico and South Korea), in order to diversify their export base away from goods that are facing adverse terms of trade, it has been difficult for women to maintain their jobs, leading in some cases to the de-feminization of manufacturing employment (UN 1999).

***Public employment is an important source of formal employment for women but under pressure.***

Governments in many countries, both developing and developed, have been under pressure in recent decades to reduce the size and role of the state. Pressures on governments have come from different sources. One has been the need to raise funds and reduce public subsidies paid to loss-making enterprises in the context of fiscal constraints that were particularly dominant in the 1980s and early 1990s (and are intensifying in the context of the post-2008 crisis). Another contributing factor has been the growing prominence of the idea that a leaner state is also one that is more efficient, bolstered by market-enhancing “governance” reforms of the 1990s which have advocated decentralized management, performance contracts and the contracting out of services (UNRISD 2010: chapter 19).

The privatization of state-owned enterprises and the creation of a leaner, more efficient state have effected women’s and men’s employment differently. It is useful to differentiate between two distinctive effects of changes in public sector employment in the context of reforms: (i) the impact of privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and (ii) the impact of the decline in the size of the public sector overall (Braunstein 2012).

Since the majority of SOEs are capital-intensive and employ more men, the impact of privatization is likely to affect women’s employment less than men’s (Birdsall and Nellis 2003; Heintz 2006). The down-sizing of the public sector overall, however, is harder on women because they have historically constituted a significant share of public sector workers in many countries, sometimes higher than their overall share of the labour force, and also because public sector employment makes up a larger share of women’s formal employment than men’s. Available ILO data show that women constituted 35 per cent of public employees in developing countries, 46 per cent in transition countries, and 50 per cent in OECD countries (Hammouya 1999). There is also evidence that government employment either declined faster or grew more slowly than private employment in most countries during the 1990s (Hammouya 1999). The reduction in public sector employment has been particularly noticeable in the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which may explain the decrease in female labour participation in this region.

In addition to privatizing many public sector activities, governments have also tried to improve efficiency within the public sector by raising user charges, rationalizing staff time, and outsourcing some services to for-profit or not-for-profit organizations. The latter organizations may not be able to provide decent wages and working conditions to their workforce. In several lower-income countries, the terms and conditions of employment for frontline public sector workers such as nurses in public hospitals have deteriorated as a result (Meena 2010; Mackintosh and Tibandebage 2006).

***Mechanisms underpinning the growth of informal employment are likely to have their origins in the structural trends and policies associated with globalization.***

A number of studies on the growth of casual and informal work make a direct causal link between globalization/liberalization and informalization of employment.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to this

<sup>7</sup> Beneria 2001; Chen et al. 2005; Heintz and Pollin 2003; Standing 1999.

explanation, others attribute the growth of labour market informality to government over-regulation—an approach that is commonly associated with the work of Peruvian economist, Hernando de Soto. According to this theory, informalization reflects the attempt by entrepreneurs to escape excessive state regulation. By operating informally, entrepreneurs can free themselves from binding state regulations that are time-consuming and costly.

The over-regulation approach does generate some useful insights into how a regulatory regime can create pressures toward informalization in contexts where labour markets are heavily regulated by the state. But how useful is it for explaining the post-1980 phase of labour market informalization? Evidence from different regions suggests that pro-labour government regulation has been weakening over the past three decades, especially in most developing countries. The incentives for entrepreneurs to circumvent state regulation should therefore also have diminished. Thus the over-regulation approach reinforces the question of why informalization has grown at a time when state regulations of labour markets, and hence the incentives for entrepreneurs to escape them, have been weakening.

The mechanisms underpinning the informalization of the labour market are therefore more likely to have their origins in the kind of structural trends and policies that have been associated with globalization (and explained above). This includes competitive pressures within export-oriented production processes associated with trade and financial liberalization, recurrent economic crises, public sector reforms triggering outsourcing and the decline in the bargaining power of organized labour.

### ***Policies and practices to improve labour market outcomes for women***

While evidence shows an increase in women's participation in the labour force globally, we have also seen that women are not always able to reap the benefits of such work. Employment does not always lead to better social and economic outcomes. What kinds of policies and practices have been used to mitigate adverse outcomes and ensure that opportunities for employment more positively impact all women? This paper reviews two sets of policies and practices that address the adverse economic and social conditions within which large sections of the population, including many workers and their dependents, find themselves: first, social protection mechanisms that are concerned with preventing, managing and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being; second, new forms of labour regulation involving companies/industries and labour interests.

### **Social Protection**

Economic security requires not only earnings/wages, but also social protection mechanisms. Social protection policies and programmes, often implemented by the state, complement labour market policies and aim to address workers' living standards and economic security. The demand for social protection mechanisms such as health and maternity insurance has been high on the agenda of trade unions and women's organizations. In fact, social protection programmes are sometimes put in place by the state in response to the "bottom-up" claims of women workers and other groups of citizens. Social protection programmes should not therefore be seen as simply top-down initiatives.

Broadly speaking there are two types of social protection interventions: social insurance and social assistance (see box II).

## Box II: A few more definitions

*Social protection* is concerned with preventing, managing and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being or living standards. It encompasses policies that protect people from the adverse consequences of illness, disability, maternity and old age; market-risks such as unemployment and price volatilities; and economic crises and natural disasters (UNRISD 2010). Historically, social protection measures have developed in the context of developed countries, where the concern is temporary income shortfalls and transitory poverty in otherwise acceptable living standards (UNRISD 2010). When applied to developing countries where poverty is chronic, there is a need to also address persistently low incomes. In such contexts, social protection must include not only "protection" but also "promotion"—measures that enhance living conditions and address everyday deprivation (Drèze and Sen 1991).

*Social insurance* refers to employment-related programmes financed by contributions from employers and employees based on earnings. Social insurance programmes tend to be accessed through (usually formal) employment.

*Social assistance* provides transfers to people who are unable to work and who are deemed eligible, whether on the basis of their income, their vulnerability status or their rights as citizens.

In the context of global concerns about poverty, policy interest in social assistance programmes (see box II) has grown. Some of these programmes, for example child-centred cash transfer schemes, explicitly target women. In some countries, especially in Latin America, social assistance programmes have significantly expanded their reach in recent years.

***The extent to which social protection measures are inclusive of women depends on how they are designed, financed and implemented.***

This is especially the case with programmes that are tied to formal employment. A number of strategies are needed—and have been tried—to make social protection programmes more gender-equitable.

### Social Insurance

***By assuming full-time, formal, life-long employment as the norm, social insurance programmes implicitly discriminate against women.***

Social insurance programmes tend to be gender-blind, meaning that most of their provisions do not treat women differently from men. Yet by assuming full-time, formal, life-long employment as the norm, such programmes implicitly discriminate against women. While social insurance benefits in many countries (though not all) did not reach beyond a relatively small segment of the population, this segment has become even smaller (relative to the overall population) in the last quarter-century, a consequence of some of the labour market trends described already. This creates a formidable challenge to maintain and expand the coverage of social insurance. Women in particular tend to have lower labour force participation rates, more frequent breaks in employment, higher prevalence of part-time and/or informal work, and lower earnings. They therefore lose out on programmes where benefits (to health or pension) are tied to individual work history. In the case of pensions, for example, in several Latin American countries, the link between labour market trajectories and benefit levels was strengthened during the pension reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. Under the new systems (defined contribution individual accounts), individuals are assumed to save for retirement and virtually no redistribution across individuals takes place in the private pillar. Saving accounts strengthen the link between individual contributions and benefits, making pensions more closely reflect the gender inequalities in labour markets.

Some governments have taken steps to adapt their social insurance programmes to changing labour markets. For example, Costa Rica and South Korea have brought informal workers and the self-employed under the coverage of health insurance programmes by making affiliation mandatory and by partially subsidizing their contributions (Mesa-Lago 2008; Kwon and Tchoe 2005). Since 2000, pension reforms in Latin America have attempted to address the gender biases in their pension systems, by creating or strengthening a government-financed solidarity pillar to enhance the pensions of workers with some contributions but with low pensions (Arza 2012). It is too early, however, to tell how these recent changes are going to affect the number of women eligible for a pension and the size of their benefits.

However, even if some such design features are introduced, they are unlikely to produce equal outcomes in terms of social protection on their own. Many women and men who work informally are likely to remain in a disadvantaged position in terms of social protection as long as social protection benefits are tied, even if loosely, to employment and earnings, and as long as pervasive gender inequalities persist within labour markets. Hence, additional and complementary strategies are also needed:

- developing systems of social protection that are not linked to employment, through **social assistance programmes**;
- strengthening **labour market regulations**, for example enforcing minimum wage legislation or eliminating discriminatory wages; and
- putting in place **pro-active social provisions**, such as public care services, to enhance women's labour market performance.

## Social Assistance

*In the context of global concerns about poverty, policy enthusiasm for targeted social assistance programmes, especially child/family cash transfer schemes, has increased in recent years.*

Unlike the narrowly targeted “safety net” projects of the early 1990s, some of these non-contributory cash transfer schemes (e.g. Bolsa Familia in Brazil) have wide coverage and are better institutionalized within the social protection system. If cash transfer programmes are well-designed and implemented, they can provide recipients, including many women, with a regular and reliable source of income, even though they tend to be small. However, there are a number of serious shortcomings that require policy attention.

First, while cash transfers can enhance poor people's access to public services, the quality of those services needs improvement through adequate state funding and regulation. There are concerns that resources allocated to CCT programmes may mean *less* public investment in public services (Melo 2008; Ghosh 2011). Second, conditionalities attached to some cash transfer programmes that require unpaid work from time-pressed mothers (for example, performing community work in addition to the commitments they have to make to taking their children for health checks and attending workshops) can be harmful, constraining their ability to take up income-earning activities (Molyneux 2007; Chant 2008). Third, family/child benefits tend to be relatively small; increasing the size of such benefits could enhance their effectiveness in reducing poverty.

Most importantly, social assistance programmes such as conditional cash transfers (CCTs) should be seen as one component of a much broader set of social policy instruments and programmes. It is dangerous therefore to reduce social policy to one policy instrument. The broader question is what specific importance to give to this single policy instrument in an overall strategy of development and gender equality.

*Public works programmes represent another form of social assistance often directed at those below a certain level of income. Women often represent a significant share of participants in these programmes.*

Public works programmes are often provided as a temporary measure to cope with the social fallout of natural disasters or deep economic crises. In some cases programme provision is on a permanent basis to guard against adverse employment conditions and promote the right to paid work as a guaranteed entitlement. One such programme is India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) which, in principle, guarantees 100 days employment a year to registered rural households on demand, along with minimum wages, gender parity of wages and provision of basic worksite facilities such as childcare (Kelkar 2009). The beneficiaries of public works programmes are likely to include a significant proportion of people who are either out of the labour force, unemployed, or working informally. Women

often represent a significant share of programme participants: in 2010 they comprised 49.5 per cent of NREGP's total employment across India (NREGA 2011). One positive outcome of this particular programme has been its effect in pushing up the wages of women agricultural workers in the vicinity, and reducing the gap between women's actual wages and the minimum wage (Dasgupta and Sudarshan 2011).

Other features that are useful in order to place women's participation in such programmes on a more equal footing include having individual (rather than household) entitlements, the inclusion of work projects that do not require heavy manual labour (such as care work) and the provision of child care facilities.

Enabling social protection: Paid leave and care services

*Access to paid leave and quality care services improves women's capacity to access employment.*

In recent years, governments in many middle-income developing countries have taken significant steps to expand both formal and non-formal or community-based forms of care and preschool education. In several middle-income countries access to preschool (4–5 year olds) has expanded for both rich and poorer households. However, provision of care services for younger age groups (0–3 years) remains limited and unequal across income groups and regions.

One concern about provision of care services is the segmented nature of programmes, where different quality services are used by children from different social/income groups, thereby reinforcing inequalities.

*Care work, a largely female domain, is often associated with poor working conditions, low wages and lack of social protection.*

The second area of concern is about the employment conditions characterizing care work—a largely female domain—such as low wages and lack of social protection, compared to non-care work requiring similar levels of education and training. While care services can become an important source of employment for women while enhancing the capabilities of care recipients, the challenge facing policy is to shift from a strategy that relies on market and voluntary provision of the most informal and exploitative kind, to one that nurtures professional, decently paid and compassionate forms of care; both workers and care recipients are likely to benefit from such a shift (Razavi and Staab 2010).

Practices and mechanisms for workers organizations and bargaining

While traditional trade unions may have lost political influence due to declining membership in recent decades, new forms of political mobilization campaigning for both labour rights and subsistence needs have proliferated. New spaces and forms of activism, strategic alliances and coalitions involving unions, NGOs and campaigning networks in support of labour rights has helped to bolster women's labour market outcomes.

Some traditional unions have opened up membership to informal workers, either to boost their own membership base or to make common cause with informal workers associations through a new "social movement unionism". The Congress of Argentine Workers (one of two national confederations in Argentina) emerged as a left-wing splinter of the traditional trade union confederation, Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) toward the late 1990s and expanded to include informally employed workers through alliances with neighbourhood organizations (Etchemendy and Collier 2007). Other associations have gained legitimacy under the umbrella of established traditional unions. Informal workers have also formed unions that cater directly to their needs, sometimes spontaneously and sometimes supported by external actors. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, for example, had 1,257,000 members throughout India in 2011, representing the single largest informal sector union in the world.



The heterogeneity and dispersion of informal workers creates challenges for the formation and scaling-up of collective action. However these movements have had some success in making informal workers more visible in policy debates and in the way labour force statistics are organized. They have also effected change around specific issues at the local, municipal level—for example, changing urban regulation to facilitate the work of street vendors or in social insurance programmes to cover domestic workers.<sup>8</sup> They have, however, had limited influence on macroeconomic policy at the national level. Some argue that in the context of globalization the policy parameters over which states can exert control (fiscal deficits, import controls) are reduced, or at least there is a change in the policies that can be legitimately contested (Collier and Handlin 2005) through lobbying at the national level.

### Voluntary standards and codes of conduct

Historically, labour standards have largely been a product of normative frameworks developed by governments, labour unions or the two together. However, with the globalization of production processes, and changing ideas about the role of the state, these frameworks have come under increasing criticism. At the same time, new forms of governance have gained ground, giving a greater role to non-state actors, including both companies/industries and civil society actors.

The limited, top-down and “soft” agenda of private voluntary regulation—which typically involved a few companies and a limited range of issues—has evolved since the early 1990s to encompass more companies/industries, different organizations representing labour interests, and a broader set of issues, including labour rights (Utting 2005). An important part of this process has been the emergence of international “soft laws” intended to guide company practice, such as the “Protect, Respect and Remedy” framework for business and human rights (approved by the Human Rights Council in 2008) or the Women’s Empowerment Principles launched by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now UNWomen) in 2010. Within these multistakeholder initiatives there is a diversity of types of worker organizing, including trade unions, NGOs and grassroots women worker associations (Hale and Shaw 2001).

However, despite these efforts, lack of information concerning the number, identity and location of suppliers makes extending the monitoring of labour conditions very challenging in practice. Multistakeholder initiatives still involve only a fraction of the world’s transnational companies, and where procedures are in place they are often weak, or very top-down and technocratic.

Highly publicized abuses of human rights in production of garments, footwear and other industries have led some businesses to address labour conditions in their supply chains through company or industry-wide codes, such as the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). This has had positive impacts on health and safety, minimum wages and employment benefits for regular and permanent workers. However, extending the implementation and monitoring of standards to the large numbers of women who work as temporary and contract workers remains the Achilles heel of corporate codes.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Economic and social policies working in tandem***

The orthodox policy approach of tight monetary and fiscal policies, and free trade and capital flows, has not proved to be conducive for either widespread development or extensive improvements in well-being and in gender equality. There is growing support for alternative macroeconomic policies that, while aiming for macroeconomic stability, take more heed of development and social goals. Changes in policy direction would include monetary and fiscal policies that are more expansionary, taxation policies that provide governments with adequate revenues to fund social expenditures and repair the erosion of the protective capacity of the state, policies that pursue selective strategic liberalization of capital flows and trade, and

<sup>8</sup> Hertz 2004 on domestic workers in South Africa, Blofield 2009 on domestic workers in Latin America.

<sup>9</sup> Bain 2010; Barrientos 2008; Barrientos and Smith 2007.

regulation of capital flows so to avoid excessive volatility in employment and exchange rates. More precisely, trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) policy must serve as a tool of development, rather than to pursue the liberalization of trade and capital flows as ends in themselves. Moreover, a variety of policy measures often referred to as “industrial policy” are essential to promote transition from an economy tied to the vagaries and limitations of over-emphasis on the production and export of commodities and labour-intensive low-value manufactures.

Nevertheless, such changes in macro policy, while more likely to foster growth, development and structural change, are not guaranteed in and of themselves to improve women’s well-being or, more particularly, to promote rapid progress in gender equality. The extent to which economic growth, structural change and technological upgrading expand women’s work opportunities and income-generating capacity depends on two crucial factors.

*First, if economic growth is to be broadly shared, it is necessary to introduce a set of labour market policies and related interventions that can affect working conditions in diverse employment situations.*

These should not only enhance the capabilities of workers to capture some of the gains, but also rectify gender imbalances and discriminatory practices.

*Second, if gender inequalities in labour markets are to be rectified, society as a whole has to seek specific means of both progressing toward a better balance between the provision of unpaid care and paid labour, and facilitating greater gender equality in both domains.*

This remains a challenge even in many advanced industrialized countries. For many developing countries attaining gender equality requires the strengthening of publicly accountable systems of mutual assurance against entitlement failure. This means investing in areas that orthodox prescriptions cannot countenance: well-functioning and accessible public health, public education and public care services that can also become a source of “decent” employment; broad-based and redistributive social insurance programmes; and public provision of a range of complementary goods and services such as clean water, subsidized food items, sanitation, electricity, transport and housing.

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