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***Gender dimensions of the world of work  
in a globalized economy***

by

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## 1. Introduction

The world economy continues its integration on various levels, which is accompanied by market liberalization and economic reforms at the national level under the forces of globalization. The recent global economic crisis which started with food and fuel price hikes is further deepening due to the current global financial melt down. It is, indeed, a worrying time for the working poor in developing countries, especially, from a perspective of advancing gender equality in the world of work in the developmental context.

Evidence shows that when an economic crisis hits, it is often women who take the blunt of the downside of such a crisis. It is expected that the current global financial crisis will have dire consequences on people in developing countries, in particular, on the working poor, (the ILO preliminarily estimates the number of world unemployment will rise by 20 million reaching over 210 million during 2009<sup>2</sup>). All countries, both developing and developed need to respond, gearing up with concrete gendered socioeconomic policy and programme measures to help their people cope with the aftermath of such a crisis; substantial job and income loss, and diminishing purchasing power of income. From the point of view of the world of work, especially for those of us working in the area of social development, the current crisis is a stark reminder that the poor need much broader safety-nets and beyond, because even those who have been the haves are joining the have-nots. We are, indeed, facing a critical time to talk about development progress in promoting women's status toward gender equality in the world of work, in order not to completely undo the past achievements and progress, in this respect.

With this ominous backdrop, this paper will discuss gender dimensions of the world of work in a globalized economy, in order to review the overall progress, and attempt to make policy recommendations for both poverty reduction and advancing gender equality in the world of work. Particular attention will be paid to gender dimensions of poverty. The second section will address gender equality in the world of work, in particular, to review the overall progress. The third section will discuss gender and working poverty issues, and the fourth section will address gender dimensions of economic policies, employment and poverty. The fifth section will list ILO's instruments for poverty alleviation and advancing gender equality. The final section will entail conclusions of the overall reflection, including implications for policies and measures for consideration, in particular, taking into account the current context of global financial and economic crisis from the perspective of both advancing gender equality in the world of work and poverty reduction in developing countries.

## 2. The world of work and gender equality

Gender equality is at the heart of the ILO's Decent Work agenda, of which aim is "to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity" (ILO, 1999)<sup>3</sup>. The aim of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda is for all workers - both women and men are to benefit from more "decent" jobs and income. True decent work could only be assured in a society that would allow labour market outcomes to provide equal opportunities and equitable living incomes to various social

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<sup>2</sup> The ILO Director General's paper on Social Consequences and Responses to the Financial and Economic Crisis, presented at the CEB meeting October, 2008 (See:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/dgo/speeches/somavia/2008/unceb.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> *Decent Work* (Geneva, ILO, 1999).

groups regardless of various personal attributes, biological, social, or political. In all countries, however, social barriers and discrimination persist with varying degrees due to prevailing social norms on gender roles that are very often slow to change. More specifically, with respect to gender-based discrimination, despite substantial progress made in promoting gender equality and narrowing gender gaps in the world of work during the last half a century, much of women's work remains in sex-stereotype occupations, that are more precarious, and vulnerable and with less pay than men's across the world. As a consequence, women are disproportionately more affected by decent work deficits, and hence, poverty than men. Women are also the main care providers to society, which is largely unpaid and economically unrecognized.

While the ILO most often addresses sex-based discrimination, as one of the most important grounds of discrimination, there are additional aspects and grounds of discrimination in the world of work. Such grounds include: race, colour, religion, political opinion, national extraction, social origin, age, and sexual orientation, the first six of which in addition to sex, are covered as grounds under the International Labour Convention no. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958). Evidence shows that the socio-economic status of women and girls among those social groups, who are discriminated against, is worse than that of their male counterparts. When a woman is of an ethnic minority in a society, she suffers from double discrimination, facing more barriers and difficulties in finding decent employment and income opportunities, and in having access to various social services. For instance, in urban Brazil, non-white women earn the lowest income on average, followed by white women, non-white men and white men being on top across all workers at different education levels.<sup>4</sup>

Improved access to labour markets and to decent and productive employment for women is crucial in the process of creating greater equality between women and men in society. The analysis of the latest data in ILO's 2009 Global Employment Trends for Women shows that in 2008, women's employment-to-population ratio was at 53.1 per cent compared to 51.9 per cent ten years ago – globally, the activity rate has not substantially changed. In the current global economic crisis, female unemployment is, again, on a slightly increasing trend after having gradually decreased between 2004 and 2007. The global female unemployment rate increased from 6.0 per cent (men at 5.7 per cent) in 2007 to 6.3 per cent (men at 5.9 per cent) in 2008. The ILO estimates, however, indicate that this may even reach as high as 7.4 per cent by the end of 2009, in the worst case scenario.<sup>5</sup> Women at the global level have a higher likelihood of being unemployed than men. The report shows clearly that most regions are making progress in increasing the number of women in decent employment, but that full gender equality in terms of labour market access and conditions of employment has not yet been attained.

**Box 1: Progress in advancing gender equality in the world of work, 1998-2008; Key facts<sup>6</sup>**

- Of all people employed in the world, 40 per cent are women, and this share has not changed over the last 10 years.
- The female adult employment-to-population ratio, world wide was 53.1 per cent in 2008 (80.3 % for men). During the last 10 years, in almost all regions, the

<sup>4</sup> The time for equality at work: Global report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, ILO, Geneva, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> *Global Employment Trends for Women*, ILO Geneva, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> ILO reports on Global Employment Trends for Women, ILO, Geneva, 2008 and 2009.

female employment-to-population ratios increased over the last 10 years; while male ratio decreased in almost all regions, except in Central and South Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

- More women are gaining access to education which is key to better and more access to employment, but equality in education is still far from the reality in some regions.
- Overall, there is not a significant difference between the sexes when it comes to young people's (aged 15 to 24 years) search for work. The unemployment rate of female youth at 12.5 per cent is only slightly higher than the male rate of 12.2 per cent. A young person's likelihood to be unemployed continues to be three times higher than for adults (2007).
- Whereas ten years ago, agriculture was the main employer for women, the services sector now provides the majority of jobs for women: out of the total number of employed women in 2008, 35.4 per cent worked in agriculture and 46.3 per cent in services. Male sectoral shares, in comparison were 32.2 per cent in agriculture and 41.2 per cent in services.
- The poorer the region, the greater the likelihood that women are among the ranks of the contributing family workers or own-account workers. These two employment status make up the newly defined "vulnerable employment". Female contributing family workers, in particular, are not likely to be economically independent (2007).
- The share of women in wage and salaried employment grew during the last decade from 41.8 per cent in 1997 to 46.4 per cent in 2007. Whereas the share of vulnerable employment decreased from 56.1 per cent to 52.7 per cent. However, the vulnerable employment share is still larger for women than for men (49.1%), especially in the worlds' poorest regions in 2008, and this is likely to be worsening in 2009 in the global economic crisis.
- The status of women in the world of work has improved, but progress has been slow. While female shares in wage and salaried work versus vulnerable employment are approaching those of men, the slow pace of progress means that disparities remain significant.

### 3. Working poverty and gender

In 2007, of the world's 3 billion working population, there were still 609.5 million workers in the world who did not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US\$1.25 a day poverty line and 1.2 billion workers did not earn enough to lift themselves and their family above the US\$2 a day line. This means that despite working, more than four out of ten workers were poor.<sup>7</sup> The ILO estimates that this is likely to substantially increase by between 3 to 7 per cent by the end of 2009 in the current global downturn. This would mean that the level of working poverty may increase from 20.6 per cent to over 26 per cent reaching a total number of 1.3 billion in 2009 in the worst case scenario. Assuming that women continue to constitute over 40 percent of the world's unemployed, the total female unemployment may increase from 76 million in 2007 to over 80 million, and the level of female working poverty is likely to also worsen in 2009. While poverty incidence in terms of the level of consumption

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<sup>7</sup> *Global Employment Trends*, January 2009 (ILO, Geneva, 2009).

and income is measured at the household level, and it is not easy to break it down by gender, it is estimated that women represent over 60 per cent of the world's absolute poor, and this situation is likely to worsen in the current global economic crisis.

Gender cuts across the household, community, society, labour market and economy. The socially ascribed roles of women and men dictate the division of labour between two genders both within the household and in the labour market. Given such persistent social values in a large number of countries, it is not surprising that females are over-represented among the poor especially in those developing countries where society is traditional and discriminatory against girls and women. However, even in rich and more egalitarian industrialized countries, women, in particular single mothers, are over-represented among the poor. Research in the U.S. has shown that single families headed by single mother made up the vast majority of welfare recipients in the early nineties, and poverty rate among working single-mother families failed to decline between 1995 and 1999.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, another research showed that black and Hispanic women were poorer during the 1990s with lower income and higher risk of entering poverty, and the former group was more likely to be in single-headed households than white or Hispanic women<sup>9</sup>.

Poverty is multi-dimensional and could be defined in various ways, as conceptualized by Baulch, which is seen below in figure 1. The first line represents demarking Private Consumption (PC), as the narrowest definition of poverty, CPR is common property resources, and SPC is state-provided consumption. Within the framework of ILO's definition of decent work, additional aspects of "freedom" and "security" could be added as the seventh and eighth levels respectively. Gender dimensions intertwine with all these aspects of poverty, and women tend to be more at disadvantaged compared to men even among the poor.

It is widely recognized that female children in a patriarchal society<sup>10</sup> tend to receive less attention and resources than boys even within a household. Girls tend to be educated less than boys in many developing countries, though much progress has been made towards gender parity in primary education. The disadvantages accumulated at early stages of life lessen the chances for a girl child to become employable in later life in the adulthood. Once being at the stage of adulthood, women tend to be discriminated against in having access to resources and decent and productive employment opportunities. Since much of common property resources (CRP) are owned and the allocation of their usufruct rights is determined by a patriarchal perspective of "men as the head (bread winner) of the household", women tend to suffer from unequal access to productive resources and assets needed to earn income in the market, or cultivate food for subsistence in the informal economy. As for the state provided consumption (SPC), it is likely that women may benefit from such more, as they are, often the ones who are held responsible to fetch water and fuel, and cultivate and prepare food for the household.

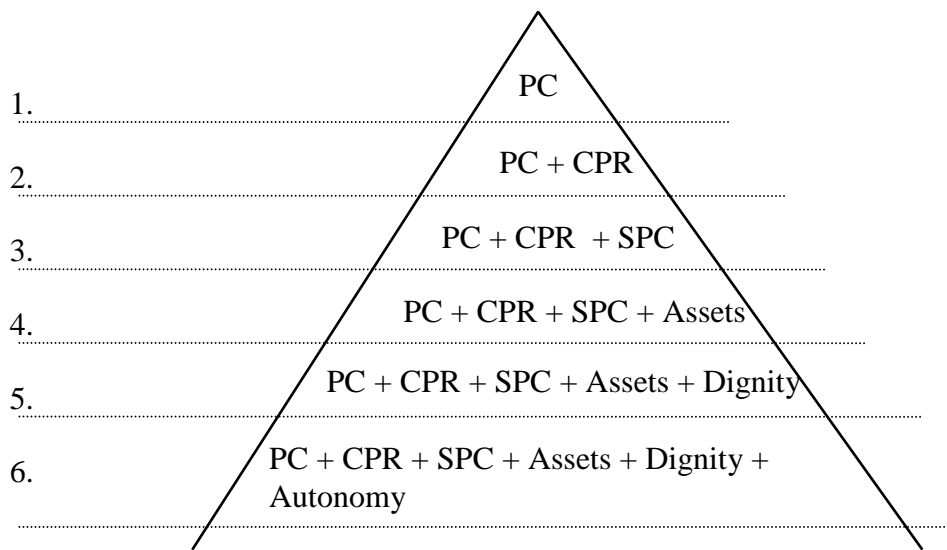
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<sup>8</sup> Porter, K. H. and Dupree, A., "Poverty Trends for Families Headed by Working Single Mothers, 1993 to 1999" ([www.cbpp.org/8-16-01wel.pdf](http://www.cbpp.org/8-16-01wel.pdf)), August 2001, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

<sup>9</sup> Wadley, J., University of Michigan News Service, "Study: More frequent, but shorter, poverty spells among single mothers after welfare reform" University of Michigan and University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> "Patriarchy" is the structuring of [society](#) on the basis of [family](#) units, where fathers have primary [responsibility](#) for the welfare of, and authority over, their families. The concept of *patriarchy* is often used, by extension (in [anthropology](#) and [feminism](#), for example), to refer to the expectation that [men](#) take primary responsibility for the welfare of the [community](#) as a whole, acting as representatives via [public office](#) ( See – web site of Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy>).

**Figure 1: A Pyramid of Poverty Concepts<sup>11</sup>**



However if such publicly provided support as food and fuel subsidy and water supply, is reduced, they are likely to be negatively impacted first. Because patriarchal society is likely to provide women with less freedom of movement and intra household decision-making power, in particular, not only to undertake economic activities outside home, but also to allocate intra household resources, their individual dignity and autonomy are also likely to be more suppressed than for those who are in more egalitarian society.<sup>12</sup>

When women are employed in the formal sector, they tend to work fewer years, and accumulate fewer social protection benefits and less income during their life time than men on average. This is one of the reasons why women tend to fall in poverty in their later life in old age. Women, therefore, continue to be over-represented among the poor and form the bottom rung of the poor in the world.

In terms of types of workers among the poor, most of them are found in the informal and rural economies. The poor are those who are working in agriculture in rural areas, and those working in the informal economy including home workers and domestic workers – a large majority of them are women. Much of women’s work in agriculture is unpaid as is the case in Sub-Sahara Africa and rural economies in South Asia, while some are engaged in wage employment in the plantation sector. Working in the informal economy, women are employed as unpaid family workers, or as self-employed doing small-scale production, vending or providing personal services. Much of their work remains invisible and unaccounted in the national statistics, they are unorganized and unprotected (in terms of access to social protection, such as medical insurance or old age pension), and neither do they have representation nor a voice. Most of those working in the informal establishments and economy do not have access to any workers’ rights respected, such as those on minimum wage, working hours or a day of rest per week, let alone those on equal rights at work and maternity protection. As a consequence, women are more disproportionately affected by

<sup>11</sup> Baulch, B.: Neglected Trade-offs in Poverty Measurement, *IDS Bulletin: Poverty, Policy and Aid*, 27(1), 1996)

<sup>12</sup> We know of those cases of honour killing of Muslim women and girls by their male members, for instance. Also see Kazemi, F. “Gender, Islam and Politics – Iran”, Iran Chamber Society, 2000.

decent work deficits and poverty than men in the world of work, in particular, in those poorer developing countries.

Women's vulnerability to poverty persists, particularly, due to: economic and political crises, civil strife, the pandemic of HIV/AIDS in a number of countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, an increasing number of environmental catastrophes, and to diminishing social support in transition economies. Girls and young and old women are at a higher risk of poverty. Due to the persistent poverty and the lack of alternative employment opportunities for women in originating communities, women are increasingly pushed into rural-urban and international migration. When they migrate internationally to work, they are also mostly engaged in lower-end jobs (3 Ds jobs – dirty, demeaning and dangerous) that the nationals of the receiving countries no longer wish to do, for example, domestic work – supporting also working women (and men) in these countries, doing their reproductive “care work”. There is also an alarming trend of exploitation, abuse and violence against migrant women and children, especially trafficking into domestic work and in the sex sector (ILO, 2004).

This is the current situation after decades of development efforts made under the mainstream development economic thinking driven by the neoliberal macroeconomic policies advocated by key international financial institutions. Why has the progress been so slow - slow, not only in terms of the speed of development and poverty reduction, but also in particular, for reducing the level of abject poverty for millions of poor women and men in developing countries?

The World Bank does advocate for promoting gender equality in development. According to 2001 World Bank report entitled *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice*, gender disparities in education and health tend to be greater among poor countries, and the report argues that gender inequalities impose costs on productivity, efficiency and economic progress. By hindering the accumulation of human capital in the home and labour market, and by systematically excluding women (or men for that matter) from access to resources, public services, or productive activities, gender discrimination diminishes an economy's capacity to grow and raise living standards (World Bank, 2001). This put forward what we call an “efficiency argument” in gender and development – still extending the concept of the human-being as “economic” (wo)man, and this is currently implemented through its gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan (World Bank, 2006).

Addressing gender discrimination especially in the context of poverty alleviation is crucial, since it manifests as structural poverty of women. It is often rooted in the existing social institution or value system which is slow to change. The social institution determines who can have access and control over: natural and financial resources, assets, means of production, education and training, employment and income opportunities, as well as entitlements to social protection. So far as the social institution functions in a discriminatory manner, the “laissez-faire” and “neoliberal” macroeconomic policy aimed at economic growth and total reliance on market forces under a “trickle-down” theory, will not automatically translate into the reduction of poverty, especially of discriminated groups, especially, poor women in traditional societies. We would, therefore, need a different approach and paradigm to macroeconomic policy framework aimed at development and poverty eradication, i.e. thereby all the humans can have the right (or entitled) to work and live their full potential in freedom, equity, dignity and human security - or, in the ILO's terms, in decent work and life.

In the current global financial and economic crisis, an increased role of the public sector is called for, and governments of G20 has met in London in April, 2009 to discuss a new regulatory framework to tighten regulation on the financial sector to increase the accountability and transparency for operations of financial institutions. At the same time, the governments of key industrialized countries have already intervened in the financial sector on an unprecedented massive scale. This is an ironical outcome of the past market-driven and “laissez-faire” financial and economic policies minimizing the role of government. Furthermore, a new macroeconomic paradigm is also being sought for the world financial systems. Now is clearly the time to call for a more inclusive New World Economic Order which can better foster faster and more inclusive economic growth for poverty reduction and improved decent work opportunities for all. The next section will address the gender dimensions of the linkages between macroeconomic policy, employment and poverty.

#### **4. Macroeconomic policy, employment and poverty: gender implications**

Promoting decent and productive employment is a most effective measure to reduce income poverty in general, but in particular for poor women. There is a clear nexus between economic growth, employment growth and poverty reduction. Currently, “pro-poor” growth is much debated in the context of development policies.<sup>13</sup> In order to make economic growth “pro-poor”, we need to increase employment content of growth, in general, but including for women, in particular.

During the last 25 years, developing countries have been implementing economic policies driven by neoliberal economic policy framework, especially under the aegis of those International Financial Institutions, under what is so-called “Washington Consensus”. The outcomes of the series of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) implemented in a large number of sub-Sahara African countries in the eighties and nineties were subject to much criticism, not only by those who were concerned with the issue of poverty reduction in general, but by “feminist economists”, in particular. They have criticized SAPs’ lack of consideration of their negative social impacts on health, education and increased burden of women’s unpaid work. The ILO was also involved in a number of studies on the gender differentiated impact of economic reforms and market liberalization on the world of work in the mid-nineties (ILO, 1998 and 1999b). The series of prescribed economic reform policies typically entailed emphasis on macroeconomic stability, freer markets, a smaller role for the public sector (involving reducing social expenditures and right-sizing and privatization of public enterprises, for instance), and liberalization of international flows of capital and goods, but not extending the same level of free movement to labour. In some instances, where the public sector had a relatively high proportion of women employees, public sector reform or “right-sizing” tended to negatively affect more women than men. But in the cases of the privatization of public enterprises, the gendered impact on employment varied depending on where women and men worked. Sometimes, the impact on female employment was more indirect, as loss of jobs for men pushed women to increase their level of economic participation leading to “additional worker” effect. During the nineties and in the 21st Century, the globalization process further accelerated, with advanced communication technologies, increased volume of international trade and an increased level of migration which is increasingly being feminized.

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<sup>13</sup> See UNDP web site on Poverty Centre research papers: <http://www.undp-povertycentre.org/pub.do#brief>.

In terms of the gendered impact of trade on work, research shows that because the export sector in developing countries is often female labour intensive, in terms of composition of workers, the impact on women's employment is pro-cyclical; i.e. when exports expand, women's employment growth is more positively impacted upon. However, the trade liberalization involving import penetration in import substitution sector could have an ambiguous impact on overall employment, and depending on where women and men work the net gendered impact on employment could vary.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of specific sectoral change in international trade, as seen in the post Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA)<sup>15</sup> period in some countries, the impact could differ depending on the expansion/reduction of the overall exports in the sector in individual countries. In those countries which lost competitive edge in the new more competitive international trade environment, such as Mauritius<sup>16</sup>, Lesotho and Dominican Republic, which the ILO has studied, a substantial number of jobs were lost. In the first two countries, because the ratio of women in employment in this sector was larger, more women were negatively affected by retrenchments, while in Dominican Republic, both women and men were more or less equally affected, as the gender composition of the sector's labour was more even. Whereas in those countries which are now benefiting from the changed trade environment, such as China (from the lifting of restricted quotas for exports to the major markets) and Bangladesh (for its maintenance of duty free privileges for exports to both EU and the US markets), so far, the initial net effect on employment in the textile and clothing sector has been more positive, but it is possible that increased competition may be having a downward pressure for worsening working conditions. In the current global economic down turn which is impacting negatively on the exports to major markets (the US and Europe), this trend may even further push this situation to worsen, and the medium and long-term impacts on employment and labour conditions in these countries are yet to be seen.

As for monetary policies, frequently reducing inflation has a negative impact on employment growth, in general, and when employment growth slows, women's employment is often disproportionately affected. Because women's formal employment often is concentrated in export sectors, maintaining a competitive exchange rate could also help counter the disproportionately negative impact on women's employment, when total employment growth slows down.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of the gendered impacts of fiscal policies on employment, evidence shows that for a given rate of economic growth, a higher share of government expenditures relative to GDP is associated with more employment – that the public sector is an important direct source of job opportunities. Therefore, when women's share is relatively higher than that of men in the civil

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<sup>14</sup> Heintz, J.: *Globalization, economic policy and employment: Poverty and gender implications* (Geneva, ILO, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> The Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) is a multilateral trade agreement on Textile and Clothing (T&C), which expired at the end of 2004, thereby countries are able to export textile and clothing without trade restrictions. But both the US and the EU still have imposed some trade restrictions on imports from China, due to sudden import surge immediately after the end of MFA. Under the current trading framework, least developed countries are still given preferential treatment, i.e. that they can export without importation taxes and fixed quotas, and also without restrictions on the sources of material used for production. Because women tend to be predominant workers in the sector in many countries, this has had gendered impact on employment in T&C producing and exporting countries.

<sup>16</sup> Otake, N.: *The impact of globalization and macroeconomic change on employment: What next in the post-MFA era?* (Geneva, ILO, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> *Op cit.*

service sector, when the downsizing takes place, as has been the case in earlier years under the Structural Adjustment Programmes, for instance, they can be more negatively affected. Regarding gendered impact of privatization of public enterprises, the outcome would differ depending on the labour market segmentation by gender and the impact on employment of women can be more indirect.<sup>18</sup> In the current global financial crisis, the narrowing fiscal space for the governments in developing countries could have more negative impacts on women than men, as women often tend to be the last to be hired and first to be fired. We would need to be vigilant for the impact of on-going economic crisis on the overall trends, in this respect.

Some empirical evidence shows that the privatization of public enterprises has also contributed to increased “informalization” of labour in countries such as India.<sup>19</sup> Across many countries, “informalization” of labour has been increasing (Benería, 2001 and 2005). Economic crisis and downturn tend to cause “informalization” of labour. This was the case in the aftermath of the Asian financial and economic crisis in the late nineties (ILO, 2000a), and more recently similar trends were also witnessed in the wake of the downturn in textile and garment sector in Mauritius<sup>20</sup>, Lesotho and Dominican Republic, earlier discussed. The increasing trend of decentralized production system under the on-going globalization process is also likely to have contributed to this trend, as has been witnessed in the case of industrial out workers, or home workers (Carr, Chen and Tate, 2000). We would, however, need more empirical study on this to be able to understand the overall dynamics in the global trends.

Under the current scenario of the global financial melt down, developing economies are likely to experience not only the overall economic slow down, but further increase of “informalization” of labour, aggravating decent work deficits and unemployment, as well as increased levels of poverty. Here again, women are likely to experience a disproportionate share of the impact of downturn, and concrete measures need to be taken urgently. The next section will discuss the ILO’s tools and measures applied in undertaking poverty reduction and promoting gender equality in the world of work.

## **5. ILO’s instruments for poverty alleviation and advancing gender equality under Decent Work agenda**

What are the optimal forms of intervention of the ILO for poverty alleviation, especially with respect to the disadvantaged groups? Promoting decent and productive employment is most effective way of reducing poverty. Needless to say, enhancing the employment content (or social content) of economic growth through adopting a set of appropriate macroeconomic policies is also critically important. Recently, the nexus between economic growth, employment growth and poverty reduction has been increasingly recognized. The macro policies and strategy must be such that growth yields efficient employment and income outcomes, and that special measures are adopted to enhance employability, participation and voice of the poor.<sup>21</sup> The ILO has been engaged in a number of policy oriented research work

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Gosh. J. *et al.* *The impact of macroeconomic change on employment in the retail sector in India: Policy implications for growth, sectoral change and employment* (Geneva, ILO, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment and UNDP, *Coping with retrenchment: Globalization, employment and livelihoods: Socio economic impact of the end of the Multi Fibre Arrangement on retrenched workers in Mauritius*, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> ILO, *Working out of poverty*, 2002; *Global Employment Agenda*, 2003.

on pro-poor growth, in this respect.<sup>22</sup> However, much of the ILO's economic research work has been more focused on productive and remunerated work (market work), and not so much on reproductive and unpaid work (non-market work) in its analysis, other than in the subject area of social protection, in relation to the issues of maternity protection and its work related to HIV/AIDS, for instance.

In terms of types of intervention for poverty reduction, the ILO's means of action for poverty eradication are: standard setting, technical cooperation, and research and advocacy in the areas of productive employment, social protection, legal and policy reforms, and organization building, which, indeed, correspond to the ILO's current four strategic areas of decent work. The four pillars of decent work are: promoting rights, promoting decent and productive employment, promoting the expansion of social protection for all; and promoting social dialogue (among the government, and employers' organizations and workers' organizations + other civil society organizations, such as women's organizations).

Poverty alleviation could be undertaken through such various measures as: redistribution of capital and assets; enhancing human capital; promoting employment in rural and informal economies; increasing labour market access and reducing labour market vulnerability; social transfers; and the organization of the poor. Over the past 30 years, the ILO has, indeed, worked on poverty alleviation targeting poor women and other social groups, in particular, through: building self-help organizations, promoting women's entrepreneurship and self-employment creation, provision of micro-credit for income generation, cooperatives development, providing wage employment through public works programmes, as well as extending social protection, targeting informal workers including home workers.<sup>23</sup> A participatory approach developed in the seventies was applied in various projects especially under a programme that was specialized in poverty alleviation targeting poor women in the rural and informal sector through employment creation during the eighties and nineties (ILO, 2000).<sup>24</sup>

As for rights-based approach, apart from the International Programme for Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)<sup>25</sup> which saw a tremendous growth in resource allocations since the nineties to-date, this has not been a major component of the ILO's strategy for poverty alleviation, in general. The ILO has a series of International Labour Standards that have direct bearing on the poor, for example, those on minimum wage, rural workers and indigenous and tribal peoples (No. 131, No. 141 and No. 169). In more recent times, a special programme has

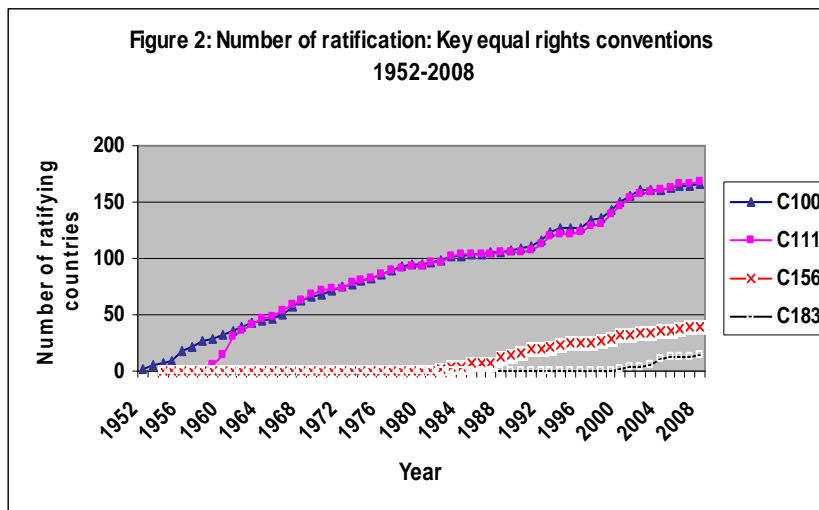
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<sup>22</sup> See ILO's paper on *Macroeconomic policies for growth and employment*, GB/ESP, Nov. 2004, GB291/ESP/1; for a candid self-critique on World Bank policies, see R. Zagha, *Economic growth in the 1990s: Learning from a decade of reform*, World Bank, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Home work is defined as follows by Convention no. 177 – Home Work (1996): (a) the term **home work** means work carried out by a person, to be referred to as a *homeworker*, (i) in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer; (ii) for remuneration; (iii) which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used, unless this person has the degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions; ... (c) the term **employer** means a person, natural or legal, who, either directly or through an intermediary, whether or not intermediaries are provided for in national legislation, gives out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity (see the ILO web site: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdsp1.htm>).

<sup>24</sup> Such projects were implemented in Asia and Africa, involving self-help women's groups to develop income-generation activities, through organization building, enhancing capacities, access to micro-credit and income-generation.

<sup>25</sup> See the ILO web site on IPEC: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/index.htm>.



(Note: C. 100 – Equal remuneration (1951); C. 111 – Discrimination (employment and occupation) (1958), C. 156 – Workers with family responsibilities (1981); C. 183 – Maternity protection (2000)<sup>26</sup>).

been implemented to promote fundamental rights and principles at work, as a follow-up to ILO Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work adopted in 1998.<sup>27</sup> The Declaration covers two key equal rights conventions, namely, Convention no. 100 – Equal Remuneration (1951), and no. 111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958). Thanks to the push for ratification of the fundamental rights International Labour Standards, these conventions are almost universally ratified – reaching 90 per cent of all the ILO member states (see figure 2 below). However, due to persistent gender norms in society and the weak enforcement mechanisms at the country level, combined with the high level of informality of employment in developing countries, this level of ratification has not yet been translated into a reality.

In terms of developing new international legal instruments which have significance, in particular, for poor women, the ILO adopted International Labour Convention No. 177 on Home Work (1996), which so far has been ratified by only five countries, namely, Albania, Argentina, Finland Ireland and Netherlands. While the efficacy of this Convention was much debated during the 1996 International Labour Conference at the time of discussion towards its adoption<sup>28</sup>, this certainly was a big mile stone for millions of home workers, a large majority are women, working across all regions, especially in the context of globalization and decentralization of the global production chains. This Convention also has been used as a tool to campaign for better working conditions for millions of home workers by organizations such

<sup>26</sup> Ratification tables on the ILO web site: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Adopted in 1998 by the International Labour Conference, the Declaration commits Member States to respect and promote principles and rights in four categories, whether or not they have ratified the relevant Conventions. These categories are: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour, the abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work aims to ensure that social progress goes hand in hand with economic progress and development (see the ILO web site: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.INDEXPAGE> ).

<sup>28</sup> The International Labour Conference deliberated extensively on the definition which was difficult to reach an agreement on, and barely reached a consensus in the adoption of the Convention on Home Work (No. 177), i.e. by voting.

as Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India.<sup>29</sup>

More recently, the Decent Work agenda adopted in 1999 as an ILO strategic framework for its work is currently being implemented in four strategic areas (rights, employment, social protection and social dialogue) of the ILO, with gender and poverty eradication as cross-cutting priorities. The ILO also adopted a Gender Policy and a Plan of Action in 2000, which aims at main-streaming gender concerns in its institution, programmes and personnel. In all four strategic areas, there are programmes that can contribute towards poverty alleviation, including for women. The ILO is also currently undertaking an active campaign to advance gender equality in the world of work- "Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work".<sup>30</sup>

As for promoting employment opportunities for the poor, including for women, the ILO is committed to promoting decent and productive employment as a development objective and attaches importance to pro-poor economic growth, employment growth and promotion of social justice, placing employment and jobs at the heart of development agenda. Convention no. 122 on Employment Policy (1964) provides an overall framework of a set of policies to promote freely chosen, productive employment and non-discrimination in all countries. Accordingly, the ILO assists its member states in implementing the Global Employment Agenda (GEA), and gender concerns are also supposed to be main-streamed across the board (see Box 2 on employment strategy check list). The ILO's call for "making decent work a global goal", as endorsed by the World Commission's report,<sup>31</sup> and ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization<sup>32</sup> is drawing increasing attention and support at the global, regional and country levels.<sup>33</sup> The GEA seeks a collective recognition and decision-making on policies and regulations that enhance "freely chosen productive employment" and promote international labour standards and workers' fundamental rights simultaneously. The ILO is currently proposing a Global Job Pact, in response to the current global economic crisis, whereby giving jobs and decent work a top priority in its response.<sup>34</sup>

**Box 2. National Employment Strategy:  
Checklist of Key Policy Areas<sup>35</sup>**

**Gender-mainstreaming and poverty reduction as cross-cutting priorities**

**A. Economic Policies to influence the demand side**

1. Macroeconomic Policies
2. Financial Policies
3. Investment policies and investment climate, including infrastructure

<sup>29</sup> See WIEGO's web site: [http://www.wiego.org/program\\_areas/org\\_rep/index.php](http://www.wiego.org/program_areas/org_rep/index.php).

<sup>30</sup> See the relevant web site: <http://www.ilo.org/gender/Events/Campaign2008-2009/lang--en/index.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> World Commission on Social Dimensions of Globalization: *A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all*, ILO, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, June, 2008 (see web ILO site: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_098017.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_098017.pdf)).

<sup>33</sup> See *A stronger social dimension of globalization*, document GB.292/WP/SDG/1, ILO Governing Body session, March 2005.

<sup>34</sup> See ILO web site on the Report on the High Level Tripartite Meeting on the Current Global Financial and Economic Crisis ([http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_104129.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_104129.pdf)).

<sup>35</sup> Implementing Global Employment Agenda: Employment strategies in support of decent work; "Vision Document" (Geneva, ILO, 2006). (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/empframe/practice/download/vision-e.pdf>).

4. Trade and Regional Integration
5. Sectoral Policies: Industrial, Services, Agriculture, environmental industries and services
6. Labour Mobility and Migration
7. Employment Intensity of Growth

#### **B. Skills and Employability**

1. Training policies and Systems
  - Vocational Training Policy Review and Development
  - Management of Training Institutions and Systems
  - Investment in Training
  - Core Work Skills
  - Workplace Learning, On the job-training and apprenticeship
2. Technology
  - Improving training delivery through International Communication and Technology
  - Improving the capacity to innovate and invest
  - Improving access to ICT to reduce the skills gap
3. Employment Services Development and Reform
  - Reform of public employment services
  - Role of private employment agencies
  - Career guidance
4. Improved access to training and employment opportunities (targeted approach)
  - Informal economy workers (in particular poor youth, and women)
  - Persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups

#### **C. Enterprise Development**

1. An enabling business environment: the national or cross-cutting themes
  - Governance and political conditions
  - Infrastructure
  - Regulations and the cost of doing business
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Access to finance
2. Value chain upgrading and clustering
3. Local Economic Development
4. Promoting good workplace practices
5. Targeting groups of enterprises and entrepreneurs:
  - SMEs
  - MNEs
  - Cooperatives
  - Entrepreneurs in the Informal Economy.

#### **D. Labour Market Institutions and Policies**

1. Institutions and policies, including wages
2. Labour market adjustment policies and programmes
3. Passive and Active Labour Market Policies
4. Employment Services
5. Industrial Relations

#### **E. Governance, Empowerment and Organizational Capital**

1. Representation, participation and advocacy
2. Freedom of Association/Collective Bargaining
3. Institution building
4. Social Dialogue

#### **F. Social Protection**

More recently, the importance of promoting full and productive employment and decent work in the development process was highlighted at the meeting of Ministers and Heads of Delegations participating in the high-level segment of the 2006 substantive session of the UN Economic and Social Council. They adopted a Ministerial Declaration affirming countries' commitment to supporting "...*fair globalization and making the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of our relevant national and international policies and their national development*

*strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of our efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals....*”<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the 2008 International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted an *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization* which will be fully followed-up, taking into consideration specific gender concerns. Another *Conclusion on Promoting rural Employment for Poverty Reduction* was also adopted by the ILC, calling for the member states’ and ILO action to promote productive employment and decent work in the rural sector where a large majority of world’s poor live and work. In the latter resolution, particular mention can be made regarding the comprehensive nature of policy and strategy guidance including macroeconomic and sectoral policies; employment policies; promoting rights at work, and social dialogue (the dialogue among those parties who are actors in the world of work). In addition, providing adequate social protection and promoting gender equality, and strengthening of labour market institutions also form part of these set of policy recommendations.<sup>37</sup>

In terms of addressing gender concerns, in general, clearly, there has been a paradigm shift in the ILO as in the UN system, which was slow in coming initially, but distinct and steady, from “women-targeted only” and women in development (WID) approach towards gender and development (GAD) approach, main-streaming gender equality concerns across the board in various programmes and activities implemented by the ILO. As a consequence, many more initiatives have been taken to promote gender concerns in the work of the ILO, in particular, since the mid-nineties.

The question, however, is what economic policy paradigm orients the ILO’s social policies? Certainly, the ILO’s paradigm of decent work where gender equality is to be placed at its core is strongly in line with the feminist economists’ paradigm on development, that we need not only to promote decent and productive (paid market) work into account, but also to balance this with reproductive (unpaid) work in the lives of world’s working poor, particularly, women. However, the process of placing decent work fully at the heart of macroeconomic policy is still a long way to go, in the overall progress of convincing developmental paradigm and economic policy frameworks across countries. In particular, we still have a long way to go in its advocacy in the current era of globalization which continues to be driven by neo-liberalism of the mainstream macroeconomic policy-making in development, which continues to be often gender blind. It is yet to be seen how the key 20 countries meeting in London this week (at the time of writing of this paper), will be able to agree on a different economic paradigm aimed at more inclusive and equitable economic growth.

With regard to gender concerns, we need not only a specific targeted approach, but also efforts that ensure all the interventions: research, technical cooperation, and standard setting (including promotional activities) are contributory towards the achievement of gender equality and equity, or main-streaming gender concerns in the entire work of the ILO – its current paradigm of decent work. This approach will also contribute more effectively towards poverty alleviation, given the predominance of women among the world’s poorest. The “operationalizing” of Decent Work Programmes at the national level, in this respect, provides

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<sup>36</sup> See the UN web site on the Ministerial Declaration:  
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G06/625/46/PDF/G0662546.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>37</sup> See the relevant ILO web site: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_098017.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_098017.pdf).

an excellent opportunity to do this, particularly, within the context of the “Delivering as One UN” approach being implemented. This could entail interventions at different levels: national institutions and governance, national policies including macro-economic, labour market and other social policies, programmes and projects, which could integrate normative principles, combining both targeted and overall gender main-streaming approaches at the same time. Creating synergy among various policy interventions programmes, and institutions would be indispensable to success.

## **6. Conclusions and implications: Policies and programmes for poverty reduction and advancing gender equality in the world of work**

- Despite substantive progress made in promoting gender equality in the world of work and overall poverty reduction during the last 50 years, women continue to be disproportionately more affected by decent work deficits and poverty than men, and hence a large majority of the world’s poor are women. The goal of decent work (and the MDG target of halving poverty by 2015) can only be fully achieved, when there is no longer gender-based discrimination and inequalities across countries, but there is still a long way to go in this respect.
- In particular, the current global economic crisis can undo much of the overall progress made in the promotion of gender equality and economic empowerment of women.
- Integrating gender equality concerns in poverty alleviation is a *sin qua non* choice for various actors in development (Governments, donor community, the UN – including the ILO, and civil society organizations), given the persistently more disadvantaged position of billions of women compared to that of men in developing countries.
- We need to pay particular attention to the nexus between economic growth, employment trends (or work trends), and poverty reduction, especially gender dimensions of the overall trends. Given how the past economic policies have not yielded satisfactory results in development and poverty reduction, in particular, for women, the current crisis gives us a golden opportunity to push for a feminist economists’ perspective and an alternative paradigm of more inclusive development, increasing the social content of macro-economic policies. This will need to entail more equitable resource distribution and appropriate rewarding of labour – those who work (both paid and unpaid), in relation to capital, and enhanced consideration of those who are economically disadvantaged.
- While there are both multilevel dimensions to poverty and multiple measures for reducing poverty, promoting better access to employment and economic opportunities for the poor, particularly women, is one of the most effective means of lifting them out of income and material poverty, and promoting their socio-economic empowerment. However, in designing direct pro-poor intervention, gauging potential impact on women’s both paid and unpaid work is key to ensure that the support provided would further empower them, rather than disempowering them, in its outcome.
- It is important to monitor the differentiated impacts of various macroeconomic policies on women and men in the world of work, as different macro policies could have different outcomes for them, depending on where they are – in which sectors they work and under which economic environment. In undertaking the analysis of social content of macro policies, it is fundamental that such analysis be gendered, and potential implications of such policies analysed through a gender specific manner, so that gendered policy implications can be drawn for women and men in the world of work.

- This is the reason why all the developing countries will need to come-up with additional safety-net measures for the working poor, with specific attention to gender dimensions, in the wake of the current global financial and economic crisis. In addition to implementing effective fiscal measures to stabilize the financial market, and introducing tighter financial regulation, in general, this may entail cash transfers to the poor, food and fuel subsidies, and regulating key commodities markets, as well as expanding both passive and active labour market measures. Such latter measures will include: public provisioning for allocations for temporary but well targeted employment guarantee schemes (including creating jobs for women); expansion of credit schemes for the poor that can be equally accessed by women; and extending/establishing an unemployment insurance for the unemployed; combined with active labour market measures of targeted training and job search facilitation for those who lose jobs in the formal sector and the unemployed, etc.
- Under direct intervention at the programme and project levels, careful targeting can possibly reach a far greater number of women, particularly among the poor, in development assistance that aims at poverty reduction.
- As for the ILO, itself, the increasing trend of creating synergy between various intervention areas and its normative instruments in the ILO's work is a sound approach. While the impacts are yet to be seen, this certainly is an important progress in its work, particularly in the domain of poverty reduction.
- Similarly, gender main-streaming across various existing programmes is a right direction, and this could potentially have a long-term positive impact on the world of work from the point of view of advancing equality and equity, though challenges are still enormous. The world is far from achieving poverty eradication, especially for women, and advancing gender quality and equity in the world of work, for that matter.
- Since addressing gender dimensions of poverty alleviation is critical for the promotion of the Decent Work agenda and the achievement of MDGs, it would be useful to have an integrated approach towards gender and poverty issues, specifically targeting the rural and informal economies. Such a strategy may combine the normative approach with other instruments of employment creation, social protection, and social dialogue, which can be implemented at multiple levels, macro, legislative, institutional, programme and project levels. This can be done building on the past experiences and lessons learned. Such an integrated approach could be tested within the framework of "operationalizing" decent work at the national level, and jointly implemented with donors and other sister UN organizations.

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