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Globalising poverty:
The gender dimension to Job Losses, Casualisation and Poverty

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While all Naledi publications adopt a pro-labour perspective, their conclusions do not represent the policies of COSATU.

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1 Introduction

Despite the massive contribution women make around the world, they still fall into the category of the poorest and the most oppressed. Women have borne the brunt of the social costs of the changes in the world economy such as globalisation, increased international competition, structural adjustment and the deregulation of labour legislation. Massive technological advances have done little to benefit women around the world. In fact, in many instances it has actually increased their hardships. Multinational companies search the globe for areas that offer cheap labour and poor working conditions. Globally, women make up the bulk of the army of so-called "flexible", cheap workers sought after by employers anxious to increase their profits. It is women who are mostly to be found in sweatshops and who are least likely to be organised. In South Africa, there is already a significant trend of homeworking in the clothing sector and casualisation in the retail and other sectors. And when they are organised into unions, women struggle to be recognised as leaders in those movements.

With massive retrenchments in the South African economy, more and more women are being pushed out of the labour market. Women's unemployment rate is higher than men's world-wide. The spate of retrenchments and job losses in the last few years have been described as a "job loss bloodbath". According to recent statistics 1 million jobs have been lost since 1994 – what does this say about GEAR's employment record? The mining and construction industries have suffered the largest job losses in the South African economy. While the workforce in these industries is predominantly male, and mostly migrant labour, the impact on women and families in rural areas is high, given the extreme rates of unemployment and poverty and their reliance on remittances. The clothing, textile, leather and footwear industry, which is female-dominated, has also been hard hit by retrenchments – approximately 76 000 jobs have been lost since 1995.

1.1 Macro-Economic Policy and Gender

Economic growth is seen as the key to job creation and poverty. However, there is no guarantee that economic growth will create jobs or alleviate poverty, unless accompanied by redistributive mechanisms.

Governments all over the world, including the South African government, often resort to economic arguments and policies that see economic growth as the starting point, without recognising the need for fundamental transformation of economic relations. They effectively rely on the "trickle down" approach to growth and development.

The gender-blind terminology of economics disguises the inherent 'male bias' in economic policies. Orthodox economics has historically been dominated by men, and does not take account of the economic realities that women face, such as household unpaid labour, discrimination and labour market segmentation. Gender hierarchies influence the ways in which women participate in the labour market. There is a gender division of labour both between and within the 'productive' paid economy and the 'informal' unorganised sector.

1.1.1 Gender-Blindness

Policies that are assumed to apply equally to both men and women are termed 'gender-blind'. However, because of the unequal position of women and men in the economy, and the particular needs of women the impact of these policies is different for women and men. This point is emphasised by the ILO (1996:38): "A gender division of labour exists both outside and within the labour market. Gender differences also exist in employment patterns and histories, and in the terms and conditions of employment. Thus, 'gender-blind' policies and programmes (which do not distinguish targets, participants or beneficiaries by sex) are often not 'gender-neutral' in their impact (i.e. they do not affect men and women in the same way)."

Why is the impact of economic policies different for women?

- Work that women do is unpaid & unrecognised
- Much of women's paid work is outside of the formal economy
- Women are concentrated in particular sectors
- Women's paid work is valued less

1.1.2 Unpaid Labour

Much of women's labour is not counted in official statistics, yet no economy could function without women's paid and unpaid labour. In fact, it is a myth that women contribute less than men to the economy. International research shows that women's unpaid labour would make up approximately one-third of GDP if taken into account (Mosse, 1993:47).

Women remain primarily responsible for unpaid reproductive labour. This is largely as a result of the sexual division of labour and the patriarchal ideology that justifies and perpetuates this. The costs of reproductive labour are high, for example, fetching wood and water where basic services are not available can take an extra hour out of a woman's day.

The sexual division of labour and the amount of time spent on unpaid labour is entrenched from an early age. According to the ILO (1996:11): "In developed countries, women work at least two hours per week more than men and often five to ten hours per week more. In developing countries, women send 31-42 hours per week in unpaid labour, while men spend between five and fifteen hours in such work".

2 Globalisation: the Gender Dimension

A key aspect of globalisation is the increasing power of international capital to determine the economic policies and paths of sovereign states. National governments are encouraged to pursue an export-led growth policy and to deregulate their economies to ensure competitiveness. Globalisation refers to the increasing integration of the world economy. The character of globalisation is shaped by the ideology that underpins it which

has come to be known as the 'neo-liberal agenda'. The following key features of the neo-liberal agenda are drawn from Isaacs (1997).

Key features of the neo-liberal agenda:

• ***'The market rules'***	The reduction of the role of the state
• ***Privatisation***	'Restructuring of State Assets' for 'efficiency'
• ***Deregulation***	Removal of price controls and state subsidies
• ***Public sector cutbacks***	Decrease in social welfare and job losses
• ***Competitiveness***	
• ***Export orientation***	Production for export prioritised over production for domestic consumption
• ***Trade liberalisation***	Removal of tariffs and protection
• ***Flexibility/Casualisation***	Erosion of labour legislation and protection

The term 'globalisation' can be misleading as it seems to imply an even process across the globe. It is important to note, however, that this process is uneven and unequal within regions, within countries and between men and women and different classes. Another misconception about globalisation is that it is perceived as an inevitable, all-powerful force against which national governments, trade unions, individuals and women in particular have very little control. In essence, globalisation is not an unstoppable force, it is a strategy pursued by multi-national corporations and assisted by national governments to increase profits and to provide access to new markets.

How has globalisation affected women's work?

Two key features of globalisation from a gender perspective are the feminisation of poverty and the feminisation of labour.

2.1 Feminisation of Poverty

The increasing levels of poverty and inequality, combined with unemployment, deregulation and cutbacks in social services and social security nets, have affected women negatively. Thus, we see the emergence of what is referred to as the feminisation of poverty.

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen defines poverty as follows: "Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterised by lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life..."(United Nations: 1995:41).

The following statistics demonstrate the gender differentiation of poverty:

- There are an estimated 1.3 billion people living in poverty in the world, of whom more than 70% are women and girls.
- Women's wages world-wide represent between 50-80% of men's.
- In some countries, girls spend 80% more time than boys on household tasks.
- Of the 130 million children in developing countries who do not go to primary school, nearly 60% are girls.
- Some 250 million children are estimated to be at work. The labour of girl-children is particularly hidden, which means that in reality this number is probably far greater.
- Women represent nearly two-thirds of the world's 855 million illiterate adults.
- Violence against women remains the most widespread violation of fundamental human rights. Because of this violence, some 60 million women who should have been alive today are dead.
- A third of the Southern African region's people live on less than US$1 per day.
- Nearly 60% of the Southern African population are without access to basic health services, over half are without access to sanitation and over 40% are without access to safe drinking water.

(Source: UNICEF, 1998 and SADC Regional Development Report, 1998).

2.2 Feminisation of Labour

There has been an overall increase in women's participation in the labour force, this has been termed the 'feminisation of labour'. Although there has been an overall increase in the proportion of women in the paid labour force, this is uneven. In poor countries the ratio of men to women in the labour force has remained roughly the same over the past few decades. In rich countries, women's share of the labour force has increased by about 5% since 1950 (Seager, 1997:118). In Sub Saharan Africa women's share of the labour force has decreased as a result of economic contractions which have been spurred on, in most cases by structural adjustment programmes (Seager, 1997). Although there has been an increase in many regions of the world this has not resulted in "better access to higher paid jobs, nor has it mitigated discrimination. In fact some studies reflect a decline in labour standards and occupations for women." Furthermore, women are often the last to benefit from job expansion and the first to suffer the consequences of job contraction. This is particularly the case in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa as a result of economic contractions due to global economic changes and the impact of structural adjustment programmes on these economies.

Global trends have had contradictory effects on women's work. On the one hand, a greater number of women have been integrated into the formal economy, which has improved their financial status, and resulted in an increase in their proportion in certain professions and management positions. Although this is an important development, only more advantaged women have benefited from this. Furthermore, even at the 'top' women are still worse off than men. Women account for only 10-20% of managerial and administrative jobs in the world. The glass ceiling still prevents women from occupying top positions, and their salaries remain lower than men's at all levels. According to the

ILO (1996:17): "Pay differentials remain one of the most persistent forms of inequality between women and men... a sizeable wage gap still remains, which reflects various forms of wage discrimination." Women still earn only between 50 and 80% of men's wages worldwide (ILO, 1996:17).

2.2.1 Women as a 'flexible' cheap labour force

The other side of the coin is that the increase of women in employment is characterised by poor quality jobs that are more insecure, vulnerable, dangerous and exploitative. According to the ICFTU (1996:5): "Women represent the great majority of the workforce in the new bastions of globalisation in the developing countries: the informal sector, the export processing zones and home working, exposed to deplorable working conditions, exploitation and fierce anti-union repression."

Thus, the 'feminisation of labour' is also driven by capital's desire for low wages, labour control, productivity and 'flexible labour' which 'women provide... through their predominance in temporary contracts as well as in part-time and unstable work' (Benería, 1989:251).

2.2.2 Casualisation

One of the features of gloablisation is the growth in 'non-standard' forms of employment, known as the casualisation of labour, through part-time work, sub-contracting, temporary or casual employment, homeworking, short term contracts and self-employment.

In the European Union, the increase in part-time work has been one of the most significant trends of the 1980s, with 85% of part-time jobs held by women. In Japan, in the face of the Asian economic crisis, "unemployment, still largely underestimated, is growing by the day, temporary employment has shot up spectacularly by more that 30% in one year" (ICFTU, 1999:14). The number doubled in 5 years (from 114 000 in 1992 to 204 000 in 1997). Almost the entire part-time workforce is comprised of women. The working conditions of part-time employees are not regulated by legislation. Part-time workers in Japan are ambiguously defined as 'people who work fewer hours than regular workers'. Even when they work the same number of hours as regular workers, they are still classified as 'part-time workers' in many cases with lower salaries and poorer working conditions than their full-time counterparts. In a report on the feminisation of poverty amongst women in Canada, Townson (1999) argues that employment no longer necessarily provides women with financial security. It has been estimated that 40% of employed women, compared with 27% of men, are now working in non-standard jobs such as part-time, temporary, part-year and contract work, as well as in self-employment. In Great Britain, part-time women workers only earn 75% of full-time women workers, and 58% of men's pay.

While in theory, part-time work may assist workers with family responsibilities, in reality it results in greater segregation and inequalities. For many women, part-time work is not a choice, it is imposed by the unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men (ICFTU, 1996:20). Part-time work does not help parents organise family

responsibilities more easily, because they do not have a say over their working hours and usually have to work evenings, nights and weekends. A further indication that part-time work is not necessarily a choice comes from a report by the European Commission which found that 37% of part-time workers would prefer to be working full-time (ICFTU, 1996:20).

Flexibility has become the buzz-word for employers, and it refers to flexibility purely related to competitiveness and greater profits and control for employers. Flexibility could be in the interests of workers, particularly those with family responsibilities, if it was negotiated on their terms, however its current form does not benefit workers, particularly women. "The motto of job flexibility is applied for the sole benefit of employers, without the slightest consideration for women workers. Irregular working hours, works schedules with no rest periods and wage cuts have served only to increase the exploitation of women workers." (ICFTU, 1999:10). Flexibility is essentially an attack by employers on the gains that have been made through trade union struggles.

In some countries, trade unions have tried to negotiate better working conditions and more security for atypical workers. Some of the elements of what has been termed 'worker-friendly flexibility' are contained in the box below.

FLEXIBILITY FOR WHOM?

Business-as-usual flexibility

- Flexible jobs with few or no benefits and lower pay
- Duration of jobs is unpredictable, at the discretion of the employer
- Hours of work fluctuate at employer's discretion
- Little opportunity for employees to take time off or alter schedule for personal needs
- When employees work at home, it is so business can save on office space, pay wages too low to cover childcare, or dodge workplace safety and child labour laws
- Hard to move flexible jobs to full-time or permanent ones

Worker-friendly flexibility

- Flexible jobs with full or proportional benefits and equal pay
- Duration of jobs matched to workers' needs and preferences
- Guarantees of minimum hours, with some predictability
- Flextime and other schedule flexibility to meet family needs
- Employees work at home when it is convenient for them
- Opportunities to move back and forth between flexible and 'standard' work arrangements

(Source: Carré and Tilly in Dollars and Sense, January/February 1998, page 25.)

The crucial point of action for trade unions is the organising of atypical workers into their ranks, and the development of creative strategies to achieve this goal.

2.2.3 Export Processing Zones

Another feature of globalisation is the emergence of Export Processing Zones (EPZ's), which are economic zones where foreign manufacturing firms produce for export and

benefit from a range of incentives from governments. They came about at the end of the 1960s when industrialised countries were looking for cheap labour and developing countries were looking for a way to solve their debt and unemployment problems. Developing countries welcomed foreign investors and offered them all kinds of favours including cheap labour and bans on trade unions. According to an ILO report (1996) the number of EPZ's has grown rapidly in the last 20-30 years to more than 850 in more than 70 countries. They employ 250 000 people in Africa, 1.2 million in Latin America and 3 million in Asia. In addition, between 14 and 40 million people are employed in the 'special economic zones' in China (ICFTU, 1998).

Young women workers make up the majority of the labour force in these zones. In the Philippines, 75% of the labour force is female, in Sri Lanka women account for 97% of the garment assembly sector and 59% of the textile sector; in Taiwan 72% of EPZ workers are women (FNV, 1997:12).

Some of the reasons for the high proportion of female workers are that employers prefer women because they pay lower wages and fire them easily in times of recession. Young women workers are seen as temporary workers because of their secondary status in the labour market, based on their child-bearing role. There is also a view that women are believed to be more 'docile' and less likely to be organised. In the micro-electronic industry employers have argued that young women have 'nimble fingers' which are useful in the production line.

Working conditions in EPZ's are characterised by the following:

- Lack of job security
- Low wages
- Health and safety risks
- Oppression and sexual harassment
- Enforced pregnancy tests and dismissal for pregnancy
- Long working hours
- Denial of the right to take breaks
- Night shifts
- Repetitive and monotonous work
- Lack of affordable housing, childcare, transport facilities near to the zones

According to a paper by the Informal Working Group on Gender and Trade (IWGGT:1998) in the EPZ's standards of health and safety are low, working hours are extremely long and workers do not have the right to unionise. Furthermore "women workers' rights are constantly violated through sexual harassment, forced submission to bodily searches and forced disclosure of their personal lives such as method of contraceptive and timing of menstruation cycle, etc. This appears to be common practice in the maquila factories of Mexico (as reported by Human Rights groups such as CLADEM). It is also not uncommon for pregnant women to lose their jobs. Minimum wage laws and other labour laws do not address these concerns."

The degree of exploitation of women workers in EPZ's raises serious questions about the role trade unions can play in alleviating these conditions. According to an FNV report (1997), the obstacles to union organisation include on the one hand, severe union repression, coming from both employers and government; and on the other hand gender-blindness on the part of trade unions. The latter refers to the perspectives and orientation of trade unions, which do not take into account the particular conditions and challenges of women workers in EPZ's. There has been some success, as with the case of the Philippine trade unions, which have been able to organise women workers in EPZ's by involving the larger community in organising attempts, and by approaching the workers in their home communities. This is important in building community-based solidarity networks, and it is less visible to management.

3 Women in the South African Economy

The South African economy is a transitional one that is rapidly being integrated into the global economy. At the same time, it is part of the African continent. Africa is faced with three major concerns that contribute to deepening poverty and inequality that are the product of Africa's position in the world economy and the legacies of colonialism and exploitation in the continent. The three development issues include the debt crises, the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes and the declining prices of commodity exports. Fantu Cheru (1996:53) characterises adjustment and the debt trap as the recolonisation of Africa. In South Africa, the government has adopted a sever macro-economic policy, GEAR that has many of the features of structural adjustment policies prescribed by the World Bank.

Structural adjustment always hits women hardest because of their position in society (Elson, 1995). Women have been described as the 'shock absorbers' of the system. It is they who are forced to deal with cuts in health and education and with unemployment and rising food prices. In essence, structural adjustment involves a transfer of the costs of the reproduction of labour to women. The assumption underlying this is that women's time and labour is "elastic" and can be stretched to infinity.

How are women affected by the impact of neo-liberal policies?

- Retrenchment of women first
- Increasing poverty and hardship means women often have to sacrifice to take care of their families
- Public sector cutbacks result in job losses for women and a setback in gender equality in the workforce, since public sector jobs offer relatively more secure and stable employment for women
- Loss of jobs in sectors where more women are likely to be employed than men, such as health and education
- Cutbacks in social security coverage for women
- Privatisation of public services affect women's access to affordable basic services and therefore increase their unpaid labour

- Loss of protective measures and social services, including public transport, that women depend on to enable them to combine jobs with family responsibilities
- Falling enrolment of girls in education and increases in child malnutrition, especially among girls
- Currency devaluations and increased prices of basic necessities
- An increase in the proportion of women engaged in the survivalist informal sector and self-employment under precarious working conditions
- Social instability often leads to increased domestic violence and abuse of women

3.1 Gender and Poverty in South Africa

In South Africa, high levels of both absolute (below a defined 'poverty line') and relative poverty exist. The unequal distribution of income inherited from the apartheid years means that deprivation of basic needs is accompanied by a vast economic gulf between the rich and the poor.
Poverty rates also are much lower for whites than for other historical racial groupings in South Africa. The degree to which poverty is concentrated in South Africa is astounding – of all poor individuals, 95 percent are African. The experience of poverty is also closely related to gender, African rural women are the most deeply affected by poverty and represent the extreme inequality in our society. For example, three in every ten (31%) of African female-headed households, and one in every five (19%) of African male-headed households, are in the bottom income category. On the other hand fewer than one in every hundred (less than 0,5%) white male-headed households are in the bottom income category. At the upper end of the scale, almost three-quarters (73%) of white male-headed households are in the top income category. Poverty also has a regional dimension – for example, 69% of individuals in the Northern Province, and 64% in the Eastern Cape are living in poverty, compared to 18% in the Western Cape and 21% in Gauteng[1].

An important measure of poverty is access to services such as running water, electricity and telecommunications. Only a quarter (25,7%) of African-headed households in non-urban areas have running water on site, a little more than a third (36,3%) have electricity as the main lighting source and less than one tenth (5,3%) have a telephone or cellphone in their dwelling[2]. The implication of these very low levels of service provision is that African rural women spend the majority of their time on unpaid work tending to reproductive responsibilities.

Another important dimension to poverty in South Africa, is that being employed does not necessarily mean an escape from poverty. Many employed people earn below the minimum living level – we therefore have poverty within the labour market, what has been termed the 'working poor'. We now turn to a discussion of the South African labour market, looking at the gender dimension to employment and unemployment.

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[1] Heintz and Jardine, 1998.
[2] October Household Survey, Statistics South Africa, 1998.

3.2 Gender and Employment and Unemployment in South Africa

3.2.1 Gender and Employment

Before we turn to a discussion on unemployment, job losses and the increasing casualisation of women's employment it is important to examine the nature of the South African labour market from a gender perspective. Women and men, black and white, occupy different positions in the South African labour market.

What causes gender bias in the labour market?

- Women's burden of unpaid labour, childcare and household work
- Women's high level of unemployment, especially in rural areas
- Bias in access to skills training
- Gender segmentation by industry and occupation, so that women have fewer choices than men and lower earnings
- Women's predominance in agricultural work, casual work and informal activities
- Gender differences in earnings for workers with similar education
- Differences in benefits

Access to wage employment for women is fundamental to development, to the elimination of poverty and could contribute to greater gender equality. However, in many cases access to wage employment amounts to the replacement of (and addition of) one form of oppression (unpaid domestic labour) with another (low paid, low status, flexible wage employment).

Gender issues and household dynamics are almost completely invisible within the current macroeconomic strategy, contributing to the on-going marginalisation of women. While GEAR might be called "gender blind," it is certainly not "gender neutral." For example, GEAR calls for greater labour market flexibility in order to attract foreign investment and to improve competitiveness. The implications of this are that the most vulnerable workers (that is, women) will remain unprotected and discriminated against, and that where jobs are created they will perpetuate poor working conditions. With greater labour market flexibility the position of women will actually worsen, since this implies decreased benefits (such as maternity benefits) and less flexibility with regard to working time and parental responsibilities. The reduction in government spending means that women will continue to perform large amounts of unpaid labour to substitute for the lack of adequate social services, further limiting women's access to alternative economic opportunities. In many respects, GEAR entrenches the economic oppression women face and increases their risk of poverty.

Labour Market Segmentation

The concept of labour market segmentation is useful in explaining the position of women in the labour market.[3]

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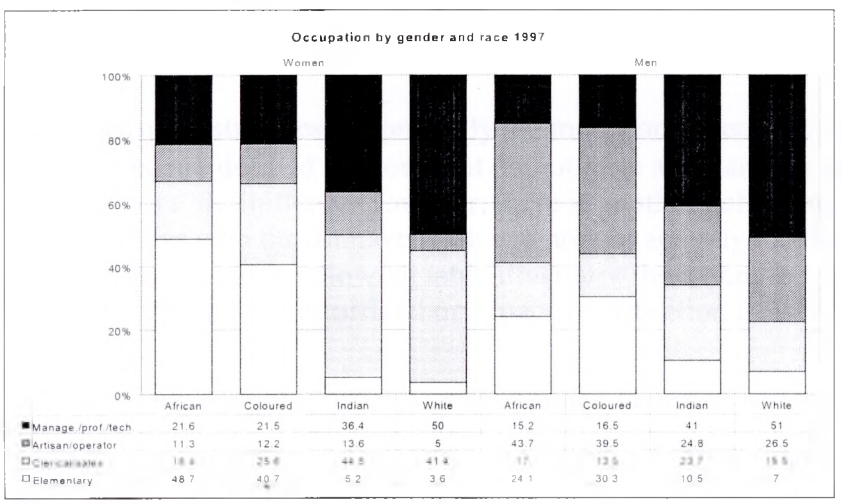
[3] See Makgetla, 1997.

The South African labour market can be divided into three broad segments: the primary labour market, the secondary labour market and non-market labour.

- The *primary labour market* consists of white-collar professional and management, who form the most highly paid and skilled section of the labour market and are mostly white males.
- The *secondary labour market* refers to production workers, low-paid service workers and agricultural labour. The secondary labour market consists of lower-paid black male workers in the manufacturing and mining sectors and mostly black female workers in agriculture and paid domestic work. The secondary labour market receives low wages and experiences a high level of unemployment, skills are often informal and in some cases (particularly female-dominated sectors) unrecognised. There are high levels of unionisation in the manufacturing industry which is dominated by males, whilst in the female dominated agricultural and domestic sectors levels of unionisation are extremely low.
- The *non-market segment* or the informal/unpaid labour market includes informal sector workers, subsistence agricultural labour and unpaid domestic and family labour. In South Africa, more women are found in informal sector jobs, which are characterised by low wages, poor working conditions, very little legal protection, and low levels of unionisation. The unpaid labour segment is almost exclusively women.

Graph 1, below, shows that African and Coloured women are more likely to be found in elementary occupations, while African and Coloured men tend to be artisans and operators. 51% of white men are in management and professional occupations. There is segmentation within the above categories as well. For example, the African women in the management/professional category are likely to be nurses and teachers, while the white men in the same category are likely to be managers and engineers.

Graph 1: Occupational segmentation by gender and race

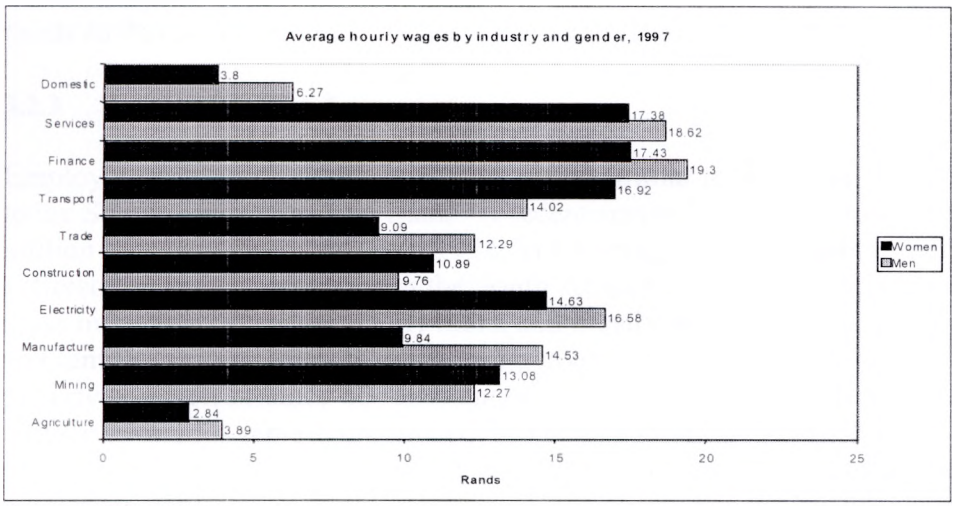


Source: OHS, 1997

Occupational segmentation of women places them in lower-paying jobs, both in terms of their grading level, but also in terms of the sectors where women predominate. Women often only go into lower-valued occupations because of a perceived lack of skills and because they are often socialised not to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations. As a consequence of occupational segmentation, women suffer wage discrimination in the labour market. There is gender-biased "value" attached to the worker on the basis of acquired characteristics (such as education, training and experience) and ascribed

characteristics (such as physical strength, intelligence, co-operation etc.) Those characteristics associated with men tend to be more highly valued and this is reflected in pay.

Graph 2: Average hourly wages by industry and gender



Source: SSA, 1997

The graph above shows that women receive lower wages than men in nearly all sectors. The only sectors where women have higher average rates of pay are mining, construction and transport. These are industries that are highly male-dominated, with low rates of pay, where the few women that are employed are probably in administrative positions.

3.2.2 Unemployment Statistics

Unemployment statistics are probably the most controversial of statistics. The unemployed are defined as those that do not have a job and are looking for one (this is the official 'strict' definition). However, there is another definition – an 'expanded' one that includes those who do not have a job and are not actively looking for a job, but would like to have one. The following table illustrates the extent to which the statistics differ according to whether the official or expanded definition is used.

Table 1: Comparing the Official and Expanded Measures of Unemployment

	African Women	African Men	White Women	White Men	Urban African Women	Non-urban African Women
Official	38,4%	29,5%	5%	4%	37,4%	39,9%
Expanded	54,9%	40,9%	7,6%	5,8%	51,2%	59,6%

Source: OHS, 1998

The most interesting point about the above table is that the greatest difference between the official and expanded measures of unemployment is for non-urban African women (39, 9% compared to 59,6%). This confirms the fact that applying the strict definition is not appropriate in the South African context, especially in rural areas. The high level of unemployment means that there are many people that would like to have a job that have

given up looking for one, yet they are not counted as unemployed according to the official definition.

Another way of assessing unemployment is to look at the percentage of people that do not have a job. In 1997 over three-quarters (78%) of African women and nearly two-thirds (65%) of African men did not have a job (Budlender, 1999).

3.2.3 Extent of the Job Losses Crisis

Employment in South Africa is now at a level similar to that of the late 1970s, according to the South African Reserve Bank. A recent survey by Andrew Levy reports that 1 million jobs have been lost since 1994. The mining and construction industries have suffered the largest job losses in the South African economy. While the workforce in these industries is predominantly male, and mostly migrant labour, the impact on women and families in rural areas is devastating, given the extreme rates of unemployment and poverty and their reliance on remittances. The clothing, textile, leather and footwear industry, which is female-dominated, has been hard hit by retrenchments – approximately 76 000 jobs were lost between 1995 and 1999. This industry accounts for 37,2% of all women in employed in manufacturing. This job loss has largely been attributed to trade liberalisation and the reduction of tariffs, which unfolded at a rapid pace over the last four years. This is a strong indication of the negative effect of globalisation on South African women workers.

Causes of job losses in the economy

According to a recent COSATU discussion document, the causes of job losses in the economy include the folowing:

- Structural changes in the economy
- Restrictive macro-economic policies
- Reduction of tariffs
- Investment strike by capital

Short-term steps that COSATU has proposed to stem job losses include:

- Make retrenchment harder through changes to the LRA
- Changes to insolvency laws
- Increase the budget deficit to increase resources available for social services and infrastructure
- Shift to a partially funded government pension fund and thus increase resources available for the above
- Limiting reductions in tariffs
- Basic income grant
- Extension of unemployment insurance to domestic and farmworkers

Longer-term change requires a shift in macro-economic policies towards employment creation.

The Jobs Summit Agreement

The Presidential Jobs Summit was held in 1998, and made a number of agreements on job creation strategies. It had a section on women including the following commitments:

- 60% of wages and employment in Special Employment Programmes should go to women
- Campaign to employ women in non-traditional occupations
- Education and Training targeting women
- Promotion of women in SMME's
- Preserving and creating jobs where women are likely to face retrenchment
- Investigation into provision of child-care

Most of the agreements that were made at the Jobs Summit are yet to be implemented, which is of great concern in the face of the massive unemployment crisis.

Government's record of job creation is not impressive. Government's goal according to GEAR was to increase job creation to reach a level of above 400 000 per annum by the year 2000 with 100 000 of these jobs related to labour-based infrastructural development and public works projects in urban and rural areas. According to the Jobs Summit Declaration, the estimated employment created to date (since 1994) in labour-intensive infrastructure programmes amounted to 195 000 jobs. (This refers to all 'Special Employment Programmes' including public works, municipal infrastructure, water affairs, housing, etc.) This estimate is probably inflated, as programmes are eager to prove what they have achieved. Nevertheless, given the scale of the unemployment crisis, and the fact that about 200 000 formal sector jobs were shed between 1994 and early 1997, this figure is very low, and far below the GEAR targets.

3.2.4 Retrenchments, Outsourcing and Privatisation in the Public Sector[4]

One of the biggest threats to women's employment is public sector cutbacks, part of the neo-liberal strategy to reduce the budget deficit and 'rightsize' the state. Although the absolute number of women and men employed in the public service are more or less equal, the public service accounts for a larger proportion of women in formal employment than men because of the fewer other opportunities open to women. The public service accounts for about 13% of total formal employment, but women public servants accounts for almost 25% of total female formal employment (De Bruyn, 1996:184).

Thus, the public sector is an important area for women's employment. Internationally the public sector has often played the role of model employer in respect of women.

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[4] Parts of this section are taken from a contribution to a chapter in *The Women's Budget IV, 1999.*

It can create favourable conditions for women's employment, by doing the following:

- Providing secure employment for women.
- Setting an example in terms of affirmative action policies
- Eliminating barriers to women's employment
- Providing effective education and training and skills development
- Creating working conditions and benefits that enhance gender equality

The public sector is also important because of its role in development and as a provider of social services. Cutbacks in public sector employment are likely to mean significant job losses for women. They are also likely to have a negative effect on social service provision and impose an increased burden for poor women in terms of their unpaid labour. In basic terms, cutbacks in social expenditure transfer these costs to women by increasing their labour time. For example, where there are fewer operational clinics women have to take responsibility for the sick.

Internationally public service transformation has been characterised by policies of 'downsizing' and 'rightsizing', in other words major retrenchments. There is a shift towards a far stronger private sector role in the provision of services that were previously provided by the state through outsourcing and privatisation. In many cases, the first functions that are outsourced are areas in which women predominate, such as cleaning. Elson notes that the loss of women's employment in the public sector affects women's bargaining power in wider labour markets because of the public sector's relative freedom from discriminatory practices when compared to the private sector (quoted in Baden:1997:43).

Gender breakdown of public sector employment

The table below provides a race and gender breakdown for seven of the 24 broad occupational groupings, these seven occupations account for 95% of all public servants. The table shows distinct segmentation on the basis of race and gender.

Table 2: Largest occupational groupings by race and gender, December 1998 (%)

	African women	African men	Coloured women	Coloured men	Indian women	Indian men	White women	White men	Total
Educators	49	27	5	3	2	1	9	3	100
Aux services	35	49	5	5	1	1	2	2	100
Police	5	53	1	8	0	3	5	24	100
Administrative	24	31	5	4	2	2	27	5	100
Health	65	7	12	1	2	1	12	1	100
Military	5	55	0	1	1	9	5	23	100
Human science	23	32	2	4	1	2	19	16	100

Source: Budlender, 1999.

The largest single category is college and school educators. They account for a third (33%) of all public servants and for 47% (almost half) of all provincial employees. Close on two-thirds (65%) of all educators are women and half (49%) are African women. The second largest grouping, auxiliary services, consists largely of unskilled workers and their supervisors. Here 43% of employees are women and a full 84% are African women

and men. In the third largest grouping – line function personnel in the police – only 12% of employees are women, and only 5% are African women.
Women account for the majority in three other occupational groupings besides educators – health personnel (91% women), social welfare personnel (83% women) and administrative support personnel (59% women). All are clearly 'female' occupations.

Retrenchments in the public service

As a result of an agreement with public sector unions, the DPSA imposed a moratorium on employer-initiated retrenchments in the public service. It relied instead of those who volunteered for voluntary severance packages. The public sector has decreased by 13% since 1996. This has been the result of attrition, freezing of posts and voluntary severance packages. Most of the decreases in employment have been at the lower pay levels, particularly in construction and road works. The shape of the public service has changed in the sense that there is a conscious effort to move towards a highly-skilled, smaller public service.

At the opening of parliament in 1998, President Mandela announced that 300 000 public sector workers would lose their jobs. The unions vowed to fight the issue. The Public Sector Bargaining Council (PSBC) subsequently agreed that there would be no retrenchments and that an audit would be undertaken under the PBC's auspices to establish skills and needs. This process has not been followed to the satisfaction of pubis sector unions, since the skills audit has largely been disregarded. The DPSA has re-opened the issue in the current bargaining round under the euphemistic term "exit management". There have been newspaper reports that approximately 250 000 public service workers may lose their jobs.

The most disturbing aspect to the proposed retrenchments is two-fold, that workers at lower levels and those providing crucial services will lose their jobs. It is likely that workers that will be affected are those at lower levels, such as cleaners, security and general assistants, and those that are most numerous, namely educators and nurses. These categories account for the highest proportion of the wage bill, particularly in provinces like the Eastern Cape and Northern Province. The problem is that these are the poorest provinces with the greatest backlogs in services. Thus, the planned retrenchments would create greater impoverishment by creating greater levels of unemployment and effectively reducing service provision.

Outsourcing

Some proponents of 'right-sizing' argue that the public service currently provides some services which should rather be provided by private providers. While some suggest complete privatisation, others propose outsourcing i.e. that government contract private agencies to perform certain functions. Very often it is the functions performed by women (and men) in the more vulnerable sectors which is affected by this policy. Cleaning, catering and security functions, for example, are often the first to be outsourced. While the same workers may be employed by the contracted companies, in many cases their working conditions are negatively affected by the change. As discussed earlier,

internationally outsourcing has had devastating effects on workers, especially women. Outsourcing has typically led to large-scale job losses. For those who remained employed, workloads were intensified and their jobs reduced to part-time or casual labour. Evidence of this in South Africa is contained in the report by Kenny and Psoulis (1997) on the outsourcing of cleaning and security by the Gauteng Department of Education. The following table compares public sector wages and conditions with those of the private company which secured the GDE cleaning contract. There was a tremendous drop in wages and a complete loss of benefits as a result of outsourcing.

Table 3: Wages and conditions of Public and Private Sector Cleaners

Sector	Monthly Wage (40 hrs/wk)	Monthly Wage (46 hrs/wk)	Benefits
Public, Cleaner I	R1450	n/a	Pension, medical aid, housing loan, travel allowance
Private, all contract cleaning (Wage Determination, 1997)	R874.66	R1005.86	None

Source: Kenny and Psoulis (1997).

In some cases outsourcing has been presented as black economic empowerment, where the government gives priority to SMME's in the tender process. However, working conditions and pay are often worse, since SMME's often cannot afford to pay minimum wages, and make use of exemptions to pay 10% less than the minimum wage.

The contracting companies are often smaller, less unionised and less union-friendly, and have worse policies in terms of gender and general conditions. Unless unions insist on particular agreements, outsourcing can also lead to job losses as the contractor is not obliged to guarantee the jobs of workers. In this case outsourcing is a way for government to effect retrenchments without doing it directly.

Privatisation

Using the private sector or private-public partnerships in the provision of infrastructure can have a significant impact in terms of the price and level of the services provided. As Renosi Mokate (1998:119) points out, the usual rationale is that the private sector is more 'efficient' than the public sector. However, the efficiency equation involves providing consumers with only the level of service they can afford and making the price reflect the cost of producing the services. This approach ignores the enormous income inequalities and poverty levels in our country. Much of the population, and many women in particular, cannot afford even the most basic of services. It is these people who most need the assistance of government. Martin argues that globally the "priorities and ethos of the public services are being commercialized so that people's needs are defined in terms not of economic and social rights but of what they can pay for" (1993:1).
The link between the provision of services and job creation is also important, but often overlooked. Where women enjoy greater access to services, the burden of unpaid labour

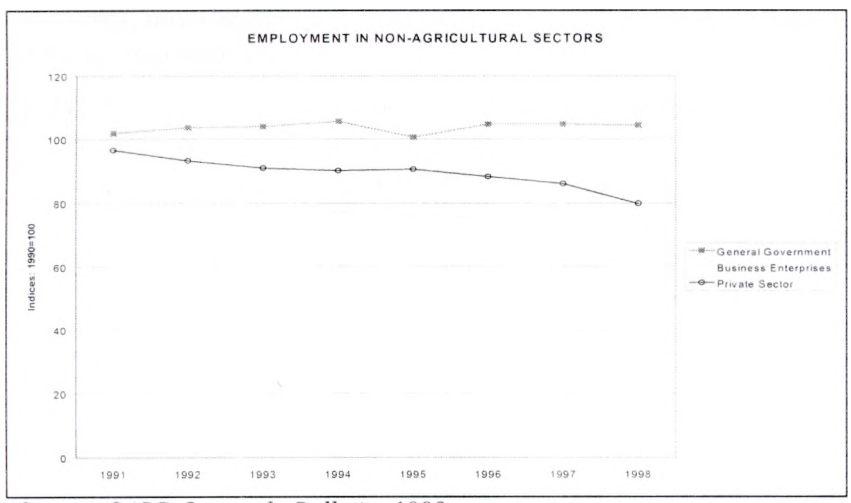
is reduced thus increasingly their mobility into the labour market. Further, the provision of services such as electricity and telecommunications can assist women in the informal sector in setting up SMME's.

According to Seidman-Makgetla (1995:2): "Privatisation of the large utilities may well counter government efforts to create jobs and raise investment. Past commercialisation policies to prepare for privatisation account for most of the fall in government investment over the past four years, and for at least a fifth of the decline in formal sector employment. The money earned from selling off the companies may thus end up going straight into job-creation schemes."

The graph below compares employment in some of the public enterprises, general government and the private sector. General government refers to national departments, local authorities, provinces and statutory bodies. Business enterprises include Transnet, the SA Post Office, Telkom and the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

The graph clearly shows the job losses in the 'business enterprises'. It could be argued that there is a direct relationship between privatisation and employment cutbacks. Employment in the business enterprises mentioned above decreased from 269 749 in 1990 to 187 745 in mid-1998. This constitutes a massive 30% decrease in employment.

Graph 3: Changes in Employment (1991-1998)



Source: SARB Quarterly Bulletin, 1998

Many of the public enterprises employ more men than women and privatisation should then affect more men than women. In fact, women form only 12% of total employment in these enterprises – 5% are black women and 7% white. There are, however, many more women who are indirectly affected by the lost earnings on the part of retrenched male workers who are part of their household. There are, however, significant differences across the enterprises. Aventura is part of the tourist industry, and over half (54%) of the workforce are women. Alexkor (mining), Safcol (forestry) and Transnet (transport), on the other hand, have less than 10% women.

3.2.5 Informalising Employment

Earlier, mention was made of the difficulties in defining unemployment, yet it appears that defining employment is no less controversial. The October Household Survey (1998), for example, maintains that the number of employed remained approximately stable. This finding is misleading, since it combines formal and informal sector employment. So while formal sector employment has shrunk (from 7,6 to 7,3 million between 1997 and 1998), people have been finding work in the informal sector. In the South African context, informal sector activities are generally survivalist in nature and cannot be considered as 'employment' in real terms. With absence of social security families are forced to engage in whatever income-generating activities they can. The approach of including informal and sector activities as employment is fundamentally flawed because: "the OHS does not distinguish between survival activities born of desperation, which do not even pay enough to subsist on, and other kinds of informal employment which could actually help alleviate poverty or serve as a bridge to decent employment." (Makgetla and Tregenna, Business Day, 1999). This prompts the question of whether work in the survivalist sector can truly and fairly be classified as employment? According to the OHS, someone earning as little as R10 a month could be considered as 'employed'.

Such assumptions have a tremendous impact on women since they are disproportionately represented in the informal sector. The table below demonstrates that there are a significant proportion of African women that are self-employed (workers for own account), most commonly survivalist activities, although there are greater numbers of African men that are employees in the informal sector.

Table 4: Proportions of workers involved in the informal sector by gender and race

Nature of informal sector involvement	African Female	African Male	White Female	White Male	Coloured Female	Coloured Male	Indian Female	Indian Male	Total
Total	49%	35%	3%	3%	5%	3%	1%	1%	100%
Employees	24%	59%	4%	4%	4%	6%	0%	0%	100%
Workers for own account	44%	38%	5%	7%	0%	4%	0%	2%	100%
Both formal and informal	39%	61%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Domestic workers	78%	13%	0%	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Source: OHS, 1998

Within this segment of the economy, women often face poor working conditions, unstable employment, a highly competitive environment, and low earnings. Furthermore, women in the informal sector do not enjoy the benefits of legal protection and regulations which they would if they worked in the formal sector.

Often, policies which aim to create new economic opportunities focus on micro-enterprises and informal sector economic activities. Such an approach to economic empowerment ignores the fact that most informal sector activities are characterised by low incomes, unstable employment, high risk, long hours, and, as mentioned above, a lack of regulation. Promoting micro-enterprises can mean the continued marginalisation

of many women within the economy and a failure to address the concrete sources of poverty and dislocation in South Africa.

Research has found that opportunities for women in the informal sector are constrained by lack of access to economic resources - for example, finances and land. There is international evidence that poor access to financial resources severely limits women's economic opportunities in small and micro enterprises. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has proved that if women gain access to even very small amounts of financial resources, large gains in economic development and welfare can be achieved. The chance of that happening in South Africa is negated by GEAR's policy positions of high interest rates and restrictions on credit availability. Such policies make it nearly impossible for women working in the informal sector to secure the resources, which they need to improve their economic positions. Likewise, although GEAR mentions land reform, the macroeconomic strategy fails to develop a strong position on land redistribution, although such a policy could have a dramatic impact on the economic reality of rural women. On the whole, GEAR fails to address the informal sector in any meaningful way and has failed women workers in this regard, in addition to the fact that its policy of trade liberalisation has caused massive disruptions in feminised industries, pushing more and more women into informal employment.

3.2.6 Casualisation

Another feature of shifting patterns of employment, is increasing casualisation. According to the SSA Survey of Total Employment and Earnings there was a total loss of 191 648 jobs between March 1998 and December 1999. However, if we break down the job losses in terms of full-time and part-time employment the picture looks quite different. A total of 345 920 full-time jobs were eliminated between March 1998 and December 1999. Over the same period 154 272 new part-time jobs were created. Therefore, full-time jobs declined by 7%, while part-time jobs increased by 70%. Thus, we are seeing a rapidly growing trend of casualisation, where full-time jobs are increasingly being replaced by part-time casual employment. This is part of an ongoing trend – Statistics South Africa estimated that from 1987 to 1997 full-time employment declined by 1%, while part-time, morning-only employment increased by 50% and other employment (casual work) increased by 81%. It should be noted that even these figures are probably a conservative estimate of casualisation because the data is collected through a survey of firms, which means that those jobs that have been outsourced or subcontracted to smaller firms that are not included in the survey would not be included. Women make up a greater proportion of part-time and casual employment than men do, while men occupy 60% of full-time jobs. This fits the pattern of employment all over the world, which is based on women's primary responsibility for childcare, as well as the greater levels of casual employment in sectors that are considered as 'female employment'. For example, there has been a rapid rate of casualisation in the retail and service sectors.

Table 5: Proportion of Full-time, Part-time and Casual amongst the employed by Gender

Gender	Full-time	Part-time	Casual
Women	40%	57%	51%
Men	60%	43%	49%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: OHS, 1998

The increase in casualisation can be seen as a response by employers to the victories that were won by trade unions in the 1980's. Casualisation, like globalisation, is a *strategy* pursued by employers, centred around increasing profits and control. It benefits employers by increasing their control over *all* workers and lowering wage and benefit costs per worker.

Casualisation has the following implications for workers:

- increased vulnerability
- undermining of trade union organisation
- undermining working standards (including protected full-time workers)
- creation of a 'two-tier' labour market

Working conditions of casual workers are characterised by the following:

- irregular and uncertain hours of work
- favouritism in allocation of working hours
- uncertain tea and lunch breaks
- working harder
- job flexibility
- more risky work
- lower wages
- no benefits

Many of the above-mentioned features of the working conditions of casual workers have particular gender implications. For example, irregular and uncertain working hours have a particular impact for women with respect to safety and secure transport arrangements, and for mothers regarding child-care arrangements, childcare leave, and other household responsibilities. There are also problems with budgeting for household necessities when work is irregular. The fact that casual workers do not have access to benefits, such as maternity pay and leave and unemployment insurance have a major impact on the impoverishment of women in particular.

According to Rees (1998:5) casual labour was made possible through the following combination of factors:

- Government allowed it by law
- Mass unemployment meant a continuous supply of labour
- Employers recruited workers in a more vulnerable position, especially women
- Limited union opposition

Limitations to organising casual workers

There was limited union opposition to casualisation because unions focused on full-time workers, neglecting casuals. Union leadership was predominantly male, while casuals were mostly women. Union organising styles and strategies are suited to full-time male workers in manufacturing. As can be seen from the table below, very few casual or part-time workers are organised into trade unions.

Table 6: Membership of trade unions

Full-time	Part-time	Casual
34%	6%	4%

Source: OHS, 1998

The workforce division between full-time and casual labour has organisational benefits for the employer. Mainly it can change the perception of full-time workers. "Those who think they are no longer the lowest group in society are less likely to take militant action, while the split in the working class allows one section of workers to be played off against the other." (Cohen, 1987:136 in Rees, 1998:4). Many full-time workers see casual workers as a threat to their jobs, while casuals see full-time workers as better off and more advantaged, and this causes divisions in the workplace. Many unions respond to this threat by trying to eliminate casualisation, whereas the most appropriate response is to fight to improve the working conditions of casual workers and build solidarity across the workforce.

Unions needs to change their style and orientation and recruit casual and other flexible workers even in the interests of full-time workers. A clear example of this is the de-recognition of SACCAWU at Woolworths because they no longer have sufficient membership.

Home-working

Casualisation assumes many forms, as discussed earlier, but another form that is pertinent to South Africa is home-working, because of its growth in the clothing industry, and its impact on women's employment. Home-working is another form of 'flexible' employment, which is part of global economic restructuring characterised by a diminishing core of workers in permanent employment and a growing periphery of 'flexible' workers. Home-working refers to all kinds of home-based work, but refers particularly to work that is performed *for an intermediary or large enterprise* from home (Theron, 1996:4). The dependency of the home worker on an employer or contractor is emphasised. It is important to note that home-working is part of a chain of production. Home workers may employ others, or may rely on the unpaid work of family members to assist them. A survey of home-based work (Theron, 1996:20) found that home-workers often earn very little compared to what retailers make, for example one woman reported that she produces for a factory that pays her R7-R9 for a shirt that retails for R80-90. In some cases, home-workers earn as little as R4 per garment. The survey found that 51% of home workers earned less than R200 per week, and 33% of men compared to 64% of women earned less than R200 per week. Only 16% of home workers said they had been

doing this type of home-based work for less than a year, 38% had been in the same work for at least five years (1996:39-43).

According to Theron (1996:23-24), regulation alone will not prevent the spread of homework, there is a need to explore new ways of organising, and the challenge is "both to represent the interests of the economically vulnerable, and to promote forms of enterprise through which they can sustain a livelihood". The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India has adopted a dual strategy of organising home-based workers to negotiate for better wages, decent working conditions and protective labour laws; and setting up co-operatives as a way of creating an alternative economic unit based on principles of sharing. The South African Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU) models itself on SEWA. There are some useful lessons that can be drawn from the experiences of organisations organising these sectors.

Further areas of research and discussion

This paper has provided a broad overview of globalisation, poverty, job losses and casualisation and the particular gender implications. There is a need to share and collect further information on union strategies to organise workers in precarious employment. Some of these should form part of the discussion at the Gender Conference.

4 Conclusion

4.1 An Alternative Approach: Creating More and Better Jobs for Women

There is a need for an integrated policy framework that contributes to employment-creation for women. Trade unions should lobby government to develop an approach to macro-economic policy and employment creation that includes the following elements:

- *An integrated policy development approach*

Strategies and policies should confront all aspects of women's oppression, including women's position in society, in the home and the structural inequalities in the economy that disadvantage them. Strategies that simply try to alleviate the position of women, without fundamentally challenging the source of their oppression are bound to fail.

- *Gender sensitive macro-economic and industrial policies*

All policy should be sensitive to the bias in 'gender-blind' policies. These are polices that do not openly discriminate against women, but have a different impact on women and men because of their different structural positions in the economy and in society. Thus, government should assess the impact of particular policies on women, for example the effect of rapid trade liberalisation, which has led to massive job losses for women.

- *Targeted employment creation for women*

Women should be actively targeted for job creation. Employment creation schemes must take into account the position of women in the economy, their reproductive role and the need to combine employment opportunities with training and skilling for future employment.

- *Deepening and extending the provision of social services by the state*

The present trend of privatisation and public sector cutbacks as envisaged in the GEAR framework goes against the vision of the RDP, which bases economic development on the meeting of basic needs. The state needs to provide these services to poor people and women in particular as a means of redistribution, which will lead to economic growth and development.

- *Socialising domestic labour*

The long term goal is to transfer the responsibility for reproductive labour from women to the society as a whole. This involves the state providing social support, facilities and social services such as education, healthcare, housing transport and other basic infrastructure (water, electricity etc.) Secondly, employers should also take responsibility for childcare facilities and parental rights such as maternity pay and parental leave. Thirdly, there should be equal sharing of family responsibilities.

- *Strategies to eliminate discrimination and segmentation in the workplace*

Employment equity legislation and affirmative action measures can help to break down the occupational segregation in the labour market. Unions must monitor and play an active role in implementing this legislation and take up strong campaigns around giving women access to 'traditional male' occupations and eliminating wage discrimination.

- *Protective and Regulatory Legislation*

Contrary to the global trends and the GEAR framework, which pushes for increased labour market flexibility, there is a need for legislation which protects women, since they are subjected to high levels of insecurity and vulnerability in the labour market. Furthermore, there are increasing trends of casualisation, part-time and home-based work which are unregulated and erode the gains that have been made in worker rights and benefits.

- *Access to productive resources for women*

Government should develop strategies to ensure that women gain access to land, natural resources, credit, capital, infrastructure, technology and skills.

- *Empowerment of women in decision-making*

A central element of an integrated strategy is the empowerment of women to participate in decision-making and policy development at all levels.

4.2 Trade Unions Organising Women and Vulnerable Workers

Another central responsibility of trade unions is organising women in order to improve their position in the workplace through collective bargaining. This requires a shift in strategies and practices. The following are some of the elements in such a shift:

- *Building women's leadership in trade unions*

It is critical to the survival of trade unions that women are in leadership positions, this will have the effect of making the union agenda more gender-sensitive, but will also encourage more women to join trade unions. This should also include employing women as organisers and electing women as shopstewards.

- *Engendering collective bargaining*

Collective bargaining remains central to improving the working conditions of workers, whether they are casual, self-employed or full-time workers. The specific needs and interests of women workers must be taken on board. Unions need to ensure that solidarity is developed between all sections of the working class.

- *Organising casuals and women in the informal sector*

A lot still needs to be done to deal with some of the divisions in the workplace and the fact that unions often do not give particular attention to the needs and interests of vulnerable workers, particularly women. Their working conditions make them more difficult to organise – but therefore all the more crucial in the struggle against poverty and capitalism. Unions should explore the successful organising strategies that have been used by the labour movement and other organisations.

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