

**Women, gender and the informal economy:  
An assessment of ILO research and suggested ways forward**

**Sylvia Chant and Carolyn Pedwell  
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Women, gender and the informal economy: An assessment of ILO research and suggested ways forward / Sylvia Chant, Carolyn Pedwell; International Labour Office. – Geneva: ILO, 2008

ISBN: 9789221206088; 9789221206095 (web pdf)

International Labour Office

Informal economy / women workers / gender roles / informal employment / research programme / research needs / role of ILO

03.01.5

Also available in French: *Femmes, égalité entre les sexes et économie informelle: évaluation des recherches menées par l'OIT et propositions concernant la marche à suivre*. Geneva, 2008; and in Spanish: *Las mujeres, el género y la economía informal: evaluación de los estudios de la OIT y orientaciones sobre el trabajo futuro*, Geneva, 2008.

*ILO Cataloguing in Publication Data*

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Printed by the International Labour Office, Geneva, Switzerland



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## Preface

This discussion paper provides an overview of ILO research on women, gender and the informal economy which was undertaken during the last two decades. It examines methodological and analytical frameworks used in various studies, identifies research gaps and proposes directions for future work. It ultimately aims to enhance ILO's work in developing consistent, coherent and coordinated policy advice to constituents across the four pillars of the ILO Decent Work Agenda: standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue.

This discussion paper is an outcome of two converging initiatives. Firstly, in order to assess the work accomplished by the ILO on Decent Work and women-specific and gender equality topics, an initial mapping exercise on existing research conducted by Headquarters and field offices was undertaken in 2007. The first findings from this mapping exercise were presented at the Workshop "Gender Equality and Decent Work: Towards a Comprehensive Research Strategy" in May 2007.<sup>1</sup> A direct outcome of the Workshop was the conclusion that a substantive review and analysis of ILO researches on women, gender and the informal economy was necessary.

Secondly, this discussion paper is one of the outputs of the In-Focus Initiative on the informal economy which was launched by the Director General to give further effect to the 2002 International Labour Conference's Resolution and conclusions concerning decent work and the Informal Economy.<sup>2</sup> In this context the In-Focus Initiative had recently held the Interregional Symposium on the Informal economy: Enabling the Transition to Formality in Geneva, 27–29 November 2007.<sup>3</sup> This Symposium provided a tripartite forum for in-depth discussion and exchange of experience on recent trends, policy responses and practical strategies that are being developed in key areas across the Decent Work Agenda that enable transition to formalization. In preparation for this Interregional Symposium, it was decided to provide specific focus on the gender dimension for the informal economy, both in the background document, as well in the symposium deliberations.

This discussion paper is a follow-up to the conclusions of both the abovementioned gender research Workshop in May and the Symposium in November of 2007. Both initiatives had identified the challenge of developing and implementing research, policy and practical initiatives which combine employment creation, social protection, rights at work and representation in ways that ensure gender equality and enable empowerment of workers in the informal economy. Therefore, this discussion paper comes as a step towards assessing the particular gaps in ILO research on women, gender and the informal economy and identifying key areas in need of future prioritization.

<sup>1</sup> The initial mapping exercise and the subsequent Workshop were both conducted by the Bureau for Gender Equality, together with the Programme for the Promotion of the Declaration, and the Policy Integration Department

<sup>2</sup> ILO: *Report of the Committee on the Informal Economy*, resolution and conclusions concerning decent work and the informal economy, adopted on 19 June 2002, ILC, 90th Session, Geneva, 2002, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc90/pdf/pr-25.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/policy/events/informal/index.htm>

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The discussion paper has been commissioned by the Bureau for Gender Equality, the Employment Policy Department and the Policy Coherence Group of the Policy Integration Department. We purposely chose an external review for this (non-exhaustive) body of ILO work to be conducted by respected gender academics and researchers. We wish to express our appreciation to the authors, Drs. Silvia Chant and Carolyn Pedwell of the London School of Economics for their extensive literature review and the preparation of this critical stock-taking. They analysed material covering years of research obtained through the initial mapping exercise and the ILO resource database on the informal economy. The paper was prepared under the guidance of Susan Maybud (GENDER), Mary Kawar (EMP/POLICY) and Amelita King-Dejardin (INTEGRATION) to whom we also extend our thanks.

It is important to note that a separate review has already been commissioned on research concerning domestic workers; therefore the topic has not been covered at length in this paper. Recently emerging research on the linkages between gender, unpaid work and paid work will need to be considered in future reviews.

We hope that this working paper will contribute to an understanding of the selected ILO work on women, gender and the informal economy and draw out the knowledge base that has been collectively generated.

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## Introduction

Informal work has not only persisted on an international scale since the 1970s, but has also expanded and appeared in new guises in the context of globalization, neo-liberalism and cross-border and rural-urban migration, all of which are highly gendered processes (Bach, 2003; Carr and Chen, 2002; Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Chen et al., 2004; ILO 2002b, 2007a; Valenzuela, 2005). While more women now participate in paid employment than at any other time in history, labour markets across all geographical regions are sex-segregated with women “concentrated in lower quality, irregular and informal employment” (Heintz, 2006: 1; see also Abramo, 2003; El-Solh, 2003; Fernández-Pacheco, 2003a, b; Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Valenzuela, 2005; Xaba et al., 2002). As increasing global integration and competition has fuelled a “race to the bottom” in which multinational corporations may relocate numerous times in search of increasingly cheaper labour (see for example, Chan, 2003; Jauch, 2002), women in the informal economy find that they are the “weakest links” in global value chains. Poor women workers of the Global South, as well as female migrant workers in a range of international contexts, generally fare worst of all (Carr and Chen, 2002: 11; see also Chakravarty et al., 2006; Kaplinsky, 2000; Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2002; Perrons, 2004, 2005; Rossignotti, 2006).

Women remain concentrated in “invisible” areas of informal work, such as domestic labour piece-rate homework, and assistance in small family enterprises, which offer precarious employment status, low, irregular or no remuneration, little or no access to social security or protection, and limited ability to organize to ensure the enforcement of international labour standards and human rights (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006; Carr and Chen, 2002; Fernández-Pacheco, 2003a, b; Reinecke et al., 2006; Vega Gramunt, 2004). Poor women employed in the informal economy also face a number of serious health and safety risks, including dangerous working conditions, gendered violence and increased susceptibility to HIV/AIDS (Ambert et al., 2007; Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Nelson, 1997). They must also often contend with deficient infrastructure and a range of time and space constraints on their productivity (Lund and Srinivas, 2000; see also Chant, 1996, 2007c; Kantor, 2002; Lessinger, 1990; Lopez-Estrada, 2002; MirafTAB, 1996; Vera-Sanso, 1995, 2006b). Gendered earning differentials in the informal economy mirror, and in many cases surpass, those in the formal sector (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006; Fernández-Pacheco, 2003b; Silveira and Matosas, 2003), due to both vertical and horizontal segregation in employment and continuing gendered inequalities associated with women’s unpaid reproductive work (Lund and Srinivas, 2000; see also Boulde, 2006; Chant, 2006, 2007a, c; Gates, 2002; Perrons, 2005). In this context, the complex relationships between informality, gendered relations of power and poverty require careful analysis.

This discussion paper provides a review and analysis of the International Labour Office’s (ILO) research on women, gender and the informal economy. In particular, it compares and contrasts analytical and methodological frameworks used in various studies; identifies research gaps and directions for future research; and pulls out key findings that may assist concerned ILO units in taking action and formulating policy directions. The report has been commissioned by the ILO’s GENDER, DECLARATION and INTEGRATION departments as a follow-up document for the ILO Tripartite Symposium on the Informal Economy, held in Geneva in November 2007. Both the paper and the symposium are linked to ILO’s Decent Work Agenda and the promotion of International Labour Standards, including the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Ministerial Declaration on Decent Work (2006).

While drawing on wider academic and policy sources to theoretically and empirically ground and exemplify key analytical and methodological issues pertinent to women,

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gender and the informal economy, the bulk of paper has been prepared on the basis of a review of ILO research and policy documents (in both English and Spanish), as well as a select number of informal interviews with key officials conducted at ILO headquarters in Geneva in September 2007.<sup>1</sup> An indicative assessment of ILO research on gender and informal economy is provided here. However, it is hoped this report will serve as the basis for more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of, and action on, gendered dimensions of informality in the future.

The focus is on the relationships between gender and informal work in the Global South, making links to industrialized and transition countries where possible, and pertinent. In line with current ILO orthodoxy, the term “informal economy” (rather than “informal sector”) is used to indicate the need to include both own account workers and wage workers in discussion and analysis of informal work. This term also signals how informal work cross-cuts a range of sectors and areas of work, and frequently overlaps with work within the formal economy. Indeed, informal and formal work should not be understood as dichotomous, but rather as intimately linked. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that, given that formal wage labour has never been relevant to more than 50 per cent of the population in many parts of the Global South, the categories of “formal” and “informal” may not always be the most relevant or useful categories of analysis (Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005: 26).

“Gender” is, within this paper, understood as a relational concept, which is constituted differently across various social, cultural and geo-political contexts in and through its interaction with other axes of social differentiation, including “race”, ethnicity, sexuality, class, religion, age and ability, among other variables. While the analysis focuses mainly on how informality affects poor women in a range of international contexts, a critical gender analysis necessitates paying attention to gendered relations of power which position and affect different groups of women and men in different ways. Strategies for achieving gender justice with respect to informality must thus address “the pervasive gendered constructs, roles and power relations which structure the wider social context” in which different forms of work arise (ibid.).

The paper begins with an overview of the ILO’s work on gender and the informal economy, linking it to its wider Decent Work Agenda. It then considers certain analytical and methodological approaches employed in ILO studies, assessing their overarching strengths and limitations. The remainder of the report is dedicated to a more detailed review and assessment of ILO studies across a range of themes, linked to the ILO’s key areas of research and technical cooperation. With respect to each theme, a brief overview of the existing literature is provided, point up key findings, and offer analysis of main research gaps and potential avenues for future research, policy and action. Afterwards some institutional and practical issues relating to the ways in which research is commissioned, produced and shared within the ILO were considered. The report concludes by providing a synthesis of the review and key recommendations for future analysis, knowledge generation and information sharing.

<sup>1</sup> Informal interviews were conducted with: Susan Maybud, Senior Coordinator, Gender Bureau; Amy King Dejardin, Gender Coordinator, Policy Integration; Mary Kawar, Gender Coordinator, Employment; Simel Esim, Gender and Women’s Workers’ Specialist, Regional Office for Arab States; Evy Messell, Director, Gender Bureau; Wouter van Ginneken, retired ILO social security specialist; Caroline O’Reilly, Senior Specialist, Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour; Manuela Tomei, Chief, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, Social Protection Sector; and Josiane Capt, Senior Specialist on the Informal Economy, Skills and Employability Department.

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## Overview of ILO's work on gender and the informal economy

The ILO's research and technical cooperation with respect to the informal economy is guided by its holistic agenda to promote "decent work" in all geographic and economic areas and sectors. With this framework, decent work is understood to be constituted by four key pillars: employment opportunities, rights, protection and voice (ILO, 2002a, b, ILO 2007a). The ILO InFocus Initiative on the informal economy seeks to develop an integrated policy approach to promoting these inter-linked aspects of decent work:

To promote decent work, there needs to be a comprehensive and integrated strategy cutting across a range of policy areas that eliminates the negative aspects of informality, while preserving the significant job creation and income-generation potential of the informal economy, and that promotes the protection and incorporation of workers and economic units in the informal economy into the mainstream economy (ILO, 2007a: 1).

Work within the economy as a whole is conceived as being dispersed along an "informal-formal" continuum in which greater degrees of formality tend to indicate more effective regulation and greater access to rights, social protection and collective bargaining power. The ILO's overarching objective is thus to shift greater numbers of workers towards the formal end of the continuum (ILO, 2002b). Lund and Srinivas (2000: 11) develop this conceptual framework, portraying the informal-formal "continuum as a cable containing different strands – which each strand being a sector, such as textiles, services, construction" (see also Centeno and Portes, 2006; Chen et al., 2004; Grown and Sebstad, 1989; Moser, 1978, 1984). This conceptualization allows "commodity chains, and the chains of ownership and supply and distribution", as well as the links between them, to come "clearly in view" (Lund and Srinivas, 2000: 11). From a gender perspective, the current challenge is to develop and implement research, policy and practical initiatives which "combine employment creation and social protection with rights at work and representation" in ways that ensure gender equality and enable empowerment for workers situated as far down, and in as many sectors of, the continuum as possible (ILO, 2007: 17).

In 2007, the ILO's Bureau for Gender Equality, together with the Programme for the Promotion of the Declaration, and the Policy Integration Department, conducted a joint research mapping exercise which identified 31 ILO texts focussing specifically on gender issues in the informal economy. The relationships between informality and gender are also addressed in a range of other ILO publications focusing on gender concerns, many of which have been reviewed in preparation for this report. On the whole, the research conducted by the ILO with relevance to women, gender and informal work is relatively comprehensive and thorough. Studies are adding analytical flesh to the bare bones of official statistics and are helping to illuminate trends in the labour market (for example the balance and interrelationships between formal and informal work, conditions in respect of social protection, the challenges of creating "decent work" across economic areas and sectors, women's and men's employment), and the intersections of these phenomena with demographic and social change, and with processes of national development, regional integration and globalization. There is a reasonable amount of discussion in the ILO literature which draws attention to the diversity of the informal economy, highlighting women's often disadvantaged position within it. These analyses relate to the type of informal occupations women do, such as domestic service, self-employed own-account work, and unpaid work within small enterprises or the home. In the context of Latin America, it is possible to discern a number of trends which are not merely confined to this region (see box 1).

**Box 1**  
**Key findings from ILO studies on trends in gender,  
work and the informal economy in Latin America**

1. Rates of labour force participation among Latin American women have increased post-1990 at a greater rate than men's, although women still represent less than half the labour force overall, have higher levels of unemployment, have experienced little change in their occupational structure, and are disproportionately represented in the informal economy (see Abramo, 2003: 19; Chávez O'Brien, 2003; Cortés, 2003; Escobar de Pabón, 2003; Farah, 2003; Fernández-Pacheco, 2003a, b, e and d., 2003; González et al., 2006; Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Todaro et al., 2000; Valenzuela, 2000a, 2005; Valenzuela and Reinecke, 2000). This is significant in light of the exceptional rate of growth in informal work: between 1990 and 2001 69 per cent of new jobs in Latin America – 2 in every 3 – were informal (Silveira and Matosas, 2003: 234).
2. Both "demand" and "supply" factors are critical in increasing women's labour force participation. Demand links to the tertiarisation of many Latin American economies (e.g. Chávez O'Brien, 2003 on Peru; Cortés, 2003 on Argentina; Escobar de Pabón, 2003 and Farah, 2003 on Bolivia; Todaro et al., 2000, on Chile; Silveira and Matosas, 2003: 236 on Latin America in general). Supply links to increasing pressures on households to increase occupational density/multiple-earning strategies (e.g. Chávez O'Brien on Peru). This, in turn, relates to the adverse effects on lower-income households of neo-liberal economic restructuring and to demographic and social changes in the continent, such as rising rates of non-marriage, separation and divorce, and female household headship (Batthyány, 2004; Chávez O'Brien, 2003; Mauro, 2005). Abramo (2003: 20), for example, notes that 30 per cent of households in Latin America are now headed by women, who are usually the principal breadwinners, and in 25 per cent of two-parent households, women contribute 50 per cent or more of household income.
3. Notwithstanding the limitations and reliability of data, in 2003 an estimated 50.1 per cent of women non-agricultural workers in Latin America were in the informal sector, compared with only 44.1 per cent of their male counterparts (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006: 44–5). Women informal workers also tend to be clustered towards the lower end of the informal occupational spectrum, as own-account workers, piece-rate subcontracted labour, domestic servants and unpaid family workers (*ibid.*; see also Fernández-Pacheco, 2003a, b; Reinecke et al., 2006; Vega Gramunt, 2004). This helps to explain, *inter alia*, why in Central America, with exception of El Salvador, gender pay gaps are larger in informal than in formal sector (Fernández-Pacheco, 2006: 155–6). In Latin America as a whole, women earn on average 64 per cent of men's wages in the formal sector and only 52 per cent in informal sector (Silveira and Matosas, 2003: 236).
4. Despite general increase in informality in Latin American region, the gap in women's and men's representation in informal work is diminishing, partly due to the greater informalization of men's work (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2005, 2006). There is also evidence of diminishing gender gaps in pay (e.g. Escobar de Pabón, 2003 on Bolivia; Gallart, 2006; Valenzuela, 2005 on Latin America generally). This said, female informal workers earn only 44 per cent of their counterparts in the formal sector, whereas male informal workers earn 65 per cent of their male counterparts, revealing women's low position in the informal economic hierarchy and fewer hours in work (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006: 54; see also Fernández-Pacheco, 2003b: 230; Silveira and Matosas, 2003).
5. Women's labour market disadvantage extends beyond pay to all aspects of employment – for example, under- and un-employment, isolation, and labour instability and precariousness (see Fernández-Pacheco, 2003a, b; Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Vega Gramunt, 2004). This also includes social protection – for example, only 23 per cent of domestic servants in region make social security payments (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006: 57), and overall, only 28 per cent of informal workers (male and female) are contributing to social security schemes (Silveira and Matosas, 2003: 238). Women are also less protected by pensions in old age than men, largely due to their shorter and more interrupted working lives, lower pay, and disproportionate involvement in the informal economy (Bertranou, 2006; see also Chant with Craske, 2003: Chapter 8). By same token, gender gaps in social benefits began narrowing in the 1990s (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006: 56). Despite these trends, women's persistent disadvantage in the labour market (coupled with their dual burden of reproductive work), plays a major role in accounting for disproportionate levels of income poverty and/or vulnerability among female-headed households (Abramo, 2003: 20; also Selamé, 2004; Valenzuela, 2003a, b). Silveira and Matosas (2003: 238) point up that households headed by one adult (80 per cent of which correspond with women), are more vulnerable than two-parent households.
6. More women are likely to work from home than men, which can reinforce the invisibilization and marginalization of female work (Bruschini with Lombarda, 2000: 189; Reinecke et al., 2006: 38). This also means fewer prospects for women of shedding their traditional responsibilities of unpaid domestic labour and care work, and limits the scope of collective organising around remunerated activities.

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A substantial range of relevant themes and concerns associated with gender and informality are addressed within ILO studies. These include:

- globalization and macroeconomic policy (Bareiro, 2004; Berger, 2003; Carr and Chen, 2002, 2004; Chen et al., 2004; Heintz, 2006);
- poverty and employment and working conditions (El-Solh, 2003; Fernández-Pacheco, 2003a, b; ILO 2004b, c; Marinakis, 2003; Musiolek, 2002; Rinehart, 2004; Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Vega Gramunt, 2004, Xaba et al., 2002);
- regulatory environment, labour standards and rights (Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007; ILO, 2002b, 2007; Schlyter, 2002);
- social security and protection (Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007; Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006; ILO, 2003a, d; Lund and Srinivas, 2000; Silveira and Matosas, 2003);
- entrepreneurship and access to finance and markets (Aliber, 2002; Carr and Chen, 2002);
- skills and training (Chaturvedi, 2005; FORMUJER Programme, 2006; Haan, 2007; Kusakabe et al., 2004; Liimatainen, 2002; Mitra, 2002; Murray, 2006; Silveira, 2005; Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Singh, 2005; Suriyasarn and Resurreccion, 2003);
- work and family (Hein, 2005 see also Conditions of Employment and Work series on reconciling work and family); and
- migration and trafficking (ILO, 2005c; see also GENPROM series on “Women and Migration”).

Within these thematic areas, the ILO has produced some important and leading-edge research on under-studied topics. Among the most significant and timely are:

- the possibilities for promoting social protection in the informal economy using a rights-based approach (Destremau, 2007; Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007; ILO, 2007c, d);
- the gendered dimensions of global commodity chains (Carr and Chen, 2002);
- gender differences in labour costs (Abramo et al., eds, 2005; Abramo and Todaro, eds, 2002; Espino and Salvador, 2002; Todaro, 2002b);
- gender and employment legislation (Madden, 2004);
- gender, informality and employment adjustment (Galli and Kucera, 2007);
- the quality of women’s work (Aguirre and Espino, 2000; Bruschini with Lombarda, 2000; Cortés, 2000; Heikel, 2000; Lund and Srinivas, 2000);
- gendered aspects of pensions (Bertranou, 2006);
- gender, unpaid work and access to paid work (Cassirer and Addati, 2007);
- rural workers (Heikel, 2000, 2004);
- girl children as unpaid and paid domestic workers (Carcedo, 2004; Sagot, 2004; Sandoval and Pernudi, 2004; Soto, 2004);

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- gender dimensions of the supply and demand aspects of sex work (Lin, 98; IPEC, 2005; Salas and Campos, ); and
  - strategies to develop the extension of trade union activities to informal economy workers (ILO/Ghana Trades Union Congress, 2008).

Through this research and analysis, the ILO is also making notable inroads in assessing gender, work and the informal economy in relation to major national and international policy initiatives such as poverty reduction strategies and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Bareiro, 2004; Berger, ed., 2003; Carr and Chen, 2002, 2004; Chen et al., 2002; Feres, 2005; Heintz, 2006; Henríquez and Reza, 2005).

It should be noted, however, that while a significant proportion of ILO studies address gender and informality with respect to macroeconomic policy, employment, entrepreneurship, skills and market access, there is much less work dealing specifically with the gendered dimensions of social protection and “voice” in the informal economy. Furthermore, analysis of these various thematic areas is not distributed evenly across key geographical regions. For example, although there are studies which address issues of gender, employment and poverty in Africa (ILO, 2004b, c; Xaba et al., 2002), little research examines issues associated with skills and training in this region. Yet when looking at South Asia, we see the reverse scenario – some studies address issues of training and skill formation (Chaturvedi, 2005; Mitra, 2002), but few focus directly on employment and poverty issues.

Only in Latin America is there coverage of all issues to a greater or lesser degree – notably studies examining skills and training (see for example, FORMUJER, 2006, ; Silveira and Matosas, 2003), studies addressing the links between gender, poverty and employment, particularly those produced under the auspices of the “Gender, Poverty and Employment” series supported by the Dutch government (see for example, Berger, ed., 2003; Fernández-Pacheco, ed., 2003; Riquelme and Valenzuela, eds, 2005; Selamé, 2004; Valenzuela, ed., 2004; Valenzuela and Rangel, eds. 2004), and studies which address issues of organization, representation and voice (Abramo and Rangel, 2005; Chiappe, 2005; Chiappe, ed., 2005; Rodríguez, 2006; Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005). It should be noted, however, that within the Arab region, a joint initiative of the ILO region for Arab States (ROAS) and the Center for Arab Women in Training and Research (CAWTAR), “Gender Equality and Workers’ Rights in the Informal Economy States”, is developing and implementing a productive approach to addressing rights, employment, social protection and training as cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing areas within the informal economy (ILO, 2007c, d; see also Charmes, 2007; Destremau, 2007; Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007). Yet, on the whole, reducing regional and thematic disparities in future research will be indispensable to ILO’s quest to promote decent work and gender equality via a “comprehensive and integrated strategy cutting across a range of policy areas” (ILO, 2007a: 1).

As will be discussed in the following sections, future ILO research on gender and informality might seek to address some key analytical concerns, namely the need to consistently apply a critical perspective which examines gendered relations of power; to develop and apply a more “intersectional” approach to gender-oriented research which analyses the ways in which gender is (re)produced through its interaction with a range of other axes of social differentiation (such as “race”, ethnicity, class, sexuality; age; religion; and ability); and the need to deal more consistently with women’s reproductive responsibilities and unpaid care work within the socio-economic analysis of informality. From a methodological perspective, ILO studies should also be looking to address root causes with respect to gender inequalities and cleavages in the informal economy. With respect to research gaps and avenues for future analysis, the following topics are identified as critical but to date have received relatively little coverage in existing ILO studies:

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information and communication technology (ICT), age and life-course (including women's employment trajectories), gender, land and property as integral to home-based work (including the problematization of "home" as the locus of many women's income-generating ventures), gendered dimensions of organization, representation and voice, gendered violence in employment, gendered norms and cultural representations, and gender, agency and choice in informal work, including the impacts of increased labour force participation on women's well-being, self-esteem, power and autonomy.

Furthermore, the relevance and accessibility of ILO studies to those working on issues of informality "on the ground" should be addressed. With a few notable exceptions (including the training materials produced by FORMUJER (see FORMUJER, 2006, nd and IPEC, 2005), many ILO studies are not particularly accessible to non-specialists, or "user-friendly" even to labour experts. Furthermore, while providing an incisive analysis of the characteristics and achievements of FORMUJER, a nominally comprehensive study by Silveira and Matosas (2003) does not go into any detail on how low-income women (the ultimate beneficiaries of this project in its different national guises) actually benefited (for example, the numbers of women trained), and whether through constructing an "occupational project" ("proyecto ocupacional") they were actually able to improve their incomes, diversify their income-generating ventures, become more pro-active in entrepreneurship, and so on. Moreover, despite consistent reference in this document to the desirability of participation and feedback, there appears to have been no consultation of women at the grassroots and there are no concrete examples of outcomes for individual women, including members of cooperative enterprises. Although it is important to know why the FORMUJER initiative has come about (in the context of growing informality in Latin American economies and persistently high unemployment, especially among women), much more of the report could have been dedicated to identifying project outcomes with detailed national examples including the voices of women. Many of the issues identified above are now discussed in further depth in the sections which follow.

## **Analytical approaches and issues**

The analytical frameworks used in the majority of the works reviewed are not actually specified, although it is clear that a "holistic" gender perspective is deployed, which covers the interrelations between gender (in)equality in the family and the workplace, and which takes into account the influences of prevailing economic and demographic trends, poverty, and state and international interventions. In some cases, authors make reference to the wider academic and historical literature and debates on a given topic that adds analytical weight and sophistication. For example, Abramo and Todaro (2002) discuss the theoretical background to debates around labour costs and childcare with reference to the work of Keynes and Folbre; Anderson (2004) frames her discussion of gender, poverty and "race" in Latin America within the broader literature on "race" and gendered identities; Batthyány (2004) sets her discussion on childcare and women's work in Uruguay in the context of literature on social welfare regimes by Hochschild and Pfau-Effinger, and Berger (2003) analyses gender and poverty linkages with reference to work of Kabeer (2003) on mainstreaming gender and poverty in the MDGs.

This aside, two key analytical issues emerged from our review of the literature. The first relates to the need to consistently apply a critical perspective which focuses on the operation and effects of gendered relations of power with respect to informality in particular contexts. Such a perspective is often used in texts which take gendered dimensions of informality as an exclusive concern (e.g. Carr and Chen, 2002; Carr and Chen, 2004; Chen et al., 2002; El-Solh, 2003; Heintz, 2006; Valenzuela, 2005). However, in broader ILO texts which address "gender issues" as one of a number of concerns, differences and inequalities between men and women are often simply noted rather than examined and interrogated within the particular configurations of power in which they

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have emerged. The risk of this approach is that gendered inequalities may be taken for granted as natural and/or fixed, rather than contingent and thus amenable to transformation and change. This analytical point is linked to the methodological necessity (discussed below) for ILO studies to ask more “why” questions which probe the root causes of particular gendered, sexualized, classed and racialized inequalities in the informal economy. Studies need to ask how global and local economic, political and social processes and institutions are gendered and, in turn, how such processes and institutions function to (re)produce gender (including ideas about what gender is and does in particular contexts) (Elson, 1998; Perrons, 2004). How do gendered attitudes, representations and norms shape (and in many cases constrain) available avenues for decent work and professional development in various contexts? How might the operation and effects of these discursive-material aspects be better addressed through ILO’s work? Gender-oriented research on informality must avoid taking the meanings of particular gendered terms and concepts for granted (i.e. as self-evident), and instead take a more critical approach that pays careful attention to issues of power, while remaining accessible to non-gender specialists. Achieving this in practice is, of course, always a difficult task.

The second concern relates to the need to develop and apply a more “intersectional” approach to gender analysis, which pays careful attention to the differences and relationships between women (as well as women and men and men and men) within particular social and geo-political contexts. Highlighting the impossibility of extracting one dimension of social differentiation (i.e. gender) from its constitutive relationship with other axes (i.e. “race”, class, sexuality, nation), feminist approaches to intersectionality emphasize the need to conduct multi-axial analysis through a gender lens. As Avtar Brah (1996: 19) argues, “structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality cannot be treated as “independent variables” because the oppression of each is described in the other – is constituted by and is constitutive of the other”. In Brah’s view, “it is imperative that we do not compartmentalize oppressions, but instead formulate strategies for challenging all oppressions on the basis of an understanding of how they interconnect and articulate” (ibid: 12.; see also Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McCall, 2005).

Analysis of how different groups of women are situated differently within (and are affected differently by) local and international socio-economic and political power relations, structures and processes is clearly gaining ground in ILO literature. For example, in their analysis of globalization, social exclusion and work, Carr and Chen (2004: 5) address the articulations among “socially-defined relationships and identities (gender, ethnicity, race or religion); work-related identities; the emergence of global production systems and shifts in domestic production systems association with globalization; and forms and patterns of social exclusion/inclusion”. In their studies of informal work, Valenzuela and Rangel, eds. (2004) and Sauma (2004a, b) examine the cross-cutting of gender by ethnicity and “race” in Latin American countries with large indigenous or Afro-American populations such as Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Guatemala, while Carcedo (2004), Sagot (2004) and Soto (2004) look at some of the issues faced by girl children and adolescents in particular respect of domestic work and the informal economy. Focusing on the Arab region, Destremau with Abi Yaghi (2007: 30) explore how “class structure interact with gender structures to reinforce links of power and domination” and consider some of the particular difficulties faced by migrant and refugee workers in the informal economy (see also Destremau, 2007; ILO, 2002d). Furthermore, in their analysis of the gendered dimensions of social protection, Lund and Srinivas (2000: 105) usefully note that “it is important not to assume sisterly solidarity among all women workers”. Citing the examples of African countries such as Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire, where there is a clear and strong class differentiation, and where the poorer women street traders are in weak bargaining position compared to those with permanent market stalls, they stress the importance of examining “the conditions under which workers in the informal economy, and in particular women, sometimes compete and sometimes cooperate” (ibid.).



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However, intersectional gender analyses are engaged with in only a minority of ILO publications. The majority of studies continue to treat “women” (or in some cases “poor” or “Third World” women) as a self-evident and homogenous group. The problem with these types of analyses is that it is assumed that women “are already constituted as sexual-political subjects prior to their entry into the arena of social relations” (Mohanty, 1991: 59). Yet, in fact, women are also “produced through these very relations” As Mohanty further argues, concepts such as “the sexual division of labour” are only helpful “if they are generated through local contextual analyses” (ibid.: 68). If such concepts are treated as if they are universally relevant, she stresses, “the resultant homogenization of class, race, religious and daily material practices of women in the third world [sic] can create a false sense of the commonality of oppressions, interests and struggles between and among women globally” (ibid.).

Moreover, even those studies that do examine gender’s constitutive articulation with social differentiation, usually only address “gender-class”, or “gender-class-race” intersections. As such, the significance of other axes, namely sexuality and age, are consistently elided from view. Indeed, despite extensive discussion of the changing configuration of the family in a number of texts mainly those focusing on Latin America (see Batthyány, 2004; Chávez O’Brien; 2003; Mauro, 2005), ILO literature conveys pervasive assumptions of traditional family formations, and thus needs to address issues of gender and work with respect to non-normative family structures and living arrangements which are increasingly prevalent in a number of geographical contexts (see Chant, 2007a; Chant with Craske, 2003: Chapters 6 and 7; Kabeer, 2007). ILO research and policy could avoid a “one size fits all” approach through analysing the ways in which sexuality (in its articulation with gender, race, nation, and religion) represents a specific axis of oppression, with respect to employment and citizenship, across a range of contexts (see Lind and Shane, 2003).

There is also a need for more analysis of the relationships between gender, age and informal work. This is critically important given trends towards demographic ageing in most parts of world, the importance of age in affecting people’s livelihoods and poverty, and the different constraints faced by women in terms of labour force participation at different stages of the life course (see Chant, 2007a; Chant with Craske, 2002: Chapter 4; Kavar, 2000a, b; Vera-Sanso, 2006b). Aside from the previously cited works on the labour of girl children, the significance of age, particularly towards the older end of the spectrum, is flagged up by only a few ILO studies (for example, Smith 2000). Valenzuela (2003b: 32) also raises the issue of how the age composition of the household is critically important for women’s work and notes that elderly people of both sexes are subject to labour market discrimination (see also Valenzuela, ed., 2003). Fernández-Pacheco (2003b: 245) also makes the observation that older women in Nicaragua are discriminated against not only account of their biological age, but their appearance (see also Chant, 2007a: Chapter 6 on Costa Rica). In sum, when discussing the possibilities of “empowerment” for women in the informal economy, ILO research needs to ask consistently, which women and where?

## **Methodological approaches and issues**

ILO research on the informal economy is generally based on quantitative data from censuses, national household and/or employment surveys (see, for example, Berger and Szretter, 2002; Madden, 2004), and occasionally on statistics compiled by regional organizations, such as the UN Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Valenzuela, 2003a, b) Studies are interrogating these data carefully, and, in so doing, helping to illuminate gendered trends and processes in the labour market with major significance to the informal economy, such as the balance between formal and informal work, the relations between changes in women’s and men’s employment and occupational

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status, conditions of social protection and “decent work”, and the intersections of these phenomena with demographic and social change, and with national development, regional integration and globalization (see for example, Abramo and Valenzuela, 2005, 2006; Bathhyány, 2004; Cortés, 2003; Escobar de Pabón, 2003; Farah, 2003; Fernández-Pacheco, 2006; Oxman, 2006; Todaro et al., 2000; Valenzuela, 2005). Some studies draw attention to lacunae in official data pertaining to gender and employment (e.g. the provision of childcare, data on home-based work and subcontracting), which are important in respect of informing directions in official national surveys and censuses (Aguirre and Espino, 2000). Other studies identify “race” as an under-reported phenomenon (see Rangel, 2004; Valenzuela and Rangel, 2004; eds, 2004). Furthermore, a good range of ILO research draws on small-scale qualitative work (primarily in the form of small surveys undertaken by the authors themselves), to better evaluate findings from quantitative data, to enrich analysis, and to shift the bias from speculative inference to informed and substantive comment (Aliber, 2002; El-Solh, 2003; Fernández-Pacheco, 2003c; Leite and de Souza, 2002; Rangel, 2005; Schlaen, 2002; Soto, 2004; Todaro, 2002b; Vega Gramunt, 2004). ILO work is thus generating important original data and interpretation with respect to gender and informality out of a broad range of countries and contexts and exposing it to wider regional and global audiences.

Furthermore, the ILO has pioneered some very interesting initiatives, employing novel and/or leading-edge methodologies, to examine various gendered dimensions of informal work. For example, the regional initiative, “Gender Equality and Workers’ Rights in the Informal Economies of Arab States”, integrates primary quantitative and qualitative research on the gendered dimensions of informality in a range of Arab States with innovative training and policy advocacy components oriented towards addressing social protection deficits in informal work with a rights-based approach (Charmes, 2007; ILO, 2007c, d; Destremau, 2007; Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007). Carr and Chen (2002) undertake critical gendered analysis of global commodity chains in the garment and agricultural industries. A study by Aguirre and Espino (2000) in Uruguay attempts to measure the quality of women’s work in the informal economy, taking into account childcare and provision of pre-school centres – which are not normally captured in official data. Research by Bathhyány (2004), also on Uruguay, uses the Madrid Scale/Index to quantify women’s care work (which includes care of children, sick people, the elderly), and accords different weights according to number of people at different ages in a household. A study by Gálvez (2006) analyses different dimensions and measurement indicators of gendered pay gaps (e.g. hours worked, income per hour worked, years of study, discrimination and so on). Moreover, under the auspices of the Action Plan of the ILO to Eliminate Discrimination in Employment and Work (2004-2007), Abramo et al. (2005) undertook an impressively detailed analysis of five countries – Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Uruguay – to examine the differential “labour costs” of employing women relative to men, primarily in the formal sector, including analysis of the costs to employers of childcare, maternity leave and so on. This, along with other ILO studies on labour costs (for example, Abramo and Todaro, eds, 2002; Espino and Salvador, 2002), although ostensibly more relevant to the formal economy, have implications for gender segregation in labour markets in general, and for women’s concentration in the informal economy in particular. For example, the finding that the “myth” of women “costing more” to employers as a result of maternity leave, childcare, breastfeeding breaks, and more frequent absenteeism persists despite evidence to the contrary (see Pochmann, 2002; also Mires, 2003), undoubtedly contributes to limiting women’s access to formal sector jobs. In turn, some of these considerations (e.g. absences from work) may impact upon women entrepreneurs’ access to loans from formal finance institutions.

As much ILO research acknowledges, however, quantitative and qualitative research in this area is constrained by the limited availability and quality of data on gender and the informal economy globally, and especially in developing contexts (Charmes, 2007; Hussmanns, 2004; ILO, 2007a, 2002 b, c). Cross-country comparison of data on informal

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work is often not possible “because different definitions have been used, statistical information is collected on an ad hoc rather than regular basis, and reliability of data is inconsistent” (ILO, 2002b: 10). Gendered inequalities in the informal economy are likely to be under-represented in existing data because “women are more likely than men to be in those informal activities that are undercounted, such as production for own consumption, paid domestic activities in private households and home work” (ILO, 2002b: 12; see also Carr and Chen, 2002; Chant, 2007b; Chant with Craske, 2003: Chapter 8). Indeed, only about “half the countries using labour force or household surveys include paid domestic workers, while the rest do not. Homeworkers are invariably excluded” (ILO, 2002b: 11). Moreover, women “are also more likely than men to be in small-scale economic units where their economic contributions are invisible and therefore not counted” or are engaged in agricultural activities “which many countries exclude from the scope of their employment surveys for practical reasons” (ibid: 12).

Collecting data on these particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups of workers is crucial in order to make their contributions and conditions visible to national and local policy makers and practitioners. It is also a first step towards promoting and enabling their organization, representation and voice within collective bargaining processes and social movements (Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005; see also Moser, 2007). Linking back to the imperative to develop and apply an intersectional gender approach, it is important that data distinguish between different groups of women in the informal economy (with respect to axes of differentiation such as class or caste, sexual orientation, “race” and ethnic background, as well sector or area of work). Existing ILO data on the informal economy, and particularly its gendered aspects, may be improved through increased collaborative work, such as with the Delhi Group. (Carr and Chen, 2002; Haussmans, 2004; ILO, 2007a).<sup>2</sup>

A broader methodological concern with respect to ILO research relates to the need for studies to more consistently ask “why” questions which probe the root causes of gendered (as well as racialized, classed and sexualized) inequalities in the informal economy, and labour markets more generally. Many conclusions drawn in existing studies are speculative, indicating the need for more primary research. This should include qualitative studies which take on the analytical imperative (discussed above) to examine the operation and effects of gendered relations of power, as they relate to economies, labour markets, socio-political structures and systems, social and cultural norms and household dynamics in particular contexts. As noted by Cortés (2000: 131) in the context of Argentina, quantitative indicators are not enough – more qualitative tools are needed to assess quality of work (see also Reinecke and Valenzuela, 2000). Studies need to ask, what are the main sources of discrimination and exclusion, and where are they to be found? As articulated by Gallart (2006: 126-7), it remains to explore the extent to which women are limited in labour market involvement on account of discrimination by employers or women’s “own needs and desires” (see also Tomei, 2006: 92).

<sup>2</sup> The Delhi Group “seeks to improve concepts, measures, and methods for collecting data on the size and contribution of the informal sector/economy. Over the past several years, progress has been made in collecting and compiling data in the informal economy by employment status and industrial sector and in calculating the contribution to the overall economy”. WIEGO made a number of key recommendations for improving data collection in the informal economy from a gender perspective, which were endorsed by the Delhi group in 1998. In particular, they “called for adding questions on ‘place of work’ and ‘degree of dependence/independence’ in labour force surveys and population censuses; and for collecting data and making estimates disaggregated by gender, formal/informal sectors, and industrial classification (including homework and street vending) in national accounts” (Carr and Chen, 2002: 4-5).

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An additional critical question is whether women are able to exert influence within the context of unequal gender relations within partnerships and households. Another important issue is that only a small number of countries have time-series data which “permit the evolution of informal employment over time to be monitored” (ILO, 2002b: 12). Despite emphasis in some ILO work on Latin America on women’s labour force participation as part of a “life project” (FORMUJER, nd; Silverira, nd; Silveira and Mastosas, 2002), a “project of personal autonomy” (Abramo, 2003), and life-long learning (FORMUJER, 2006; Silveira and Matosas, 2003) we know little about how changes in the informal economy have affected/are affecting different groups of women, and specifically about occupational changes in women’s lives over the life course in different contexts (e.g. movements between formal and informal employment). This knowledge gap indicates the need for more longitudinal studies which track the evolution of gendered employment trajectories, as well as monitoring exercises analysing the impact of various interventions. In the absence of appropriate statistical panel data, this points to the desirability of ILO research to generate new data, both of a quantitative and qualitative nature (for example, through retrospective life history work and so on).

## **Review and assessment of literature by theme**

In this section, the ILO’s research on gender and the informal economy is assessed in further depth in relation to a range of thematic areas which correspond to the ILO’s key areas of technical cooperation: (i) growth strategies, productivity, and quality employment generation; (ii) regulatory environment including promotion of International Labour Standards and core rights; (iii) entrepreneurship, skills, microfinance, and market access; (iv) extension of social security and protection; (v) organization, representation and social dialogue; and (vi) area-based local development. With respect to each thematic area, we provide a brief review of the strengths and weaknesses of existing ILO research and identify research gaps, areas for future research and policy implications. Consideration of specific groups of workers, including home-based workers, street vendors, domestic workers and agricultural workers is integrated across the above themes.

### **Growth strategies, productivity, and quality employment generation**

#### ***Overview and key findings***

ILO research provides sophisticated macro-analysis of the relationship between globalization, neo-liberal macroeconomic policies and the increase of informality. In the context of greater international economic integration, “some countries have experienced little or no growth, while others have concentrated on capital-intensive growth, resulting in ‘jobless growth’” (ILO, 2002b: 29). In both contexts, economies have failed to create sufficient numbers of quality jobs to absorb the labour force and are thus pushing ever greater numbers of people into the informal economy and producing decent work deficits. Retrenched workers from restructured industries and cross-border migrants, as well as migrants from rural areas, “find themselves underemployed and/or in casual labour” (ILO, 2007a: 8). Important gendered implications of these economic shifts are addressed in general terms. As greater numbers of men enter the informal economy, “women tend to be pushed to the lowest-income end of the informal economy, often as industrialized outworkers or petty traders” (ILO, 2002b: 34–35). This is particularly evident in countries pursuing “high-tech” economic growth, where the demand for high skills (which men have more opportunities to acquire) relegates those without such skills (many of whom are poor women) to lower rungs of the informal economy (Carr and Chen, 2002: 9–10; ILO, 2002b: 29).

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ILO studies acknowledge that work in the informal economy has provided employment opportunities to particular groups of women which may not otherwise have been available, and has enabled some women to exercise a degree of choice and flexibility with respect to balancing productive and reproductive labour (Carr and Chen, 2002; ILO, 2002b). On the whole, however, the “feminization” of informal labour has served to exacerbate gendered, sexualized, racialized and classed inequalities. As the “weakest links” in global value chains, “women temporary workers fail to reap much of the benefits of the export boom”, and also lose out on social security and protection (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006; Bertranou, 2006; Lund and Srinivas, 2000). Moreover, despite some narrowing of disparities between women’s and men’s labour force participation and informalization, gendered pay gaps, levels of social protection and so on (see Abramo and Valenzuela, 2005, 2006; Escobar de Pabón, 2003; Gallart, 2006; Valenzuela, 2005), “economic reforms have intensified demands on women’s unpaid work in the home”, thus exacerbating women’s reproductive burden (Heintz, 2006: 1; see also Chant, 2007a; Kabeer, 2007; Lind, 2002). In addition to the macro-level studies cited above, a number of other ILO publications examine the relationships among gender, globalization, informality, poverty and decent work within particular geographical regions (see, for example, Valenzuela, 2005 and Solorzano and Cid, 2005 on Latin and Central America; ILO, 2004b, c and Xaba et al., 2002 on Africa; Howell, 2002 and ILO 2006b on East Asia; El-Solh, 2003; Marinakis, 2003; Musolek, 2002 on the Arab States; and Bernabé, 2002 on the transition states).

ILO literature maintains that if the problems of jobless growth and decent work deficits are to be addressed effectively, “the dominant economic policy regime will have to change” (Heintz, 2006: iii).<sup>3</sup> Quality employment generation must be positioned as a central concern within economic and social policies if the negative effects of informality are to be ameliorated (ILO 2007a; see also ILO, 2002b, 2003c). This is an important point given the lack of attention paid to employment (and specifically the gendered dimensions of informal employment) within the wider globalization-growth-poverty debate. Indeed, neither the MDGs nor most national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) prioritise quality job creation as essential to poverty eradication programmes (Chen et al., 2004; Grown et al., 2005; Kabeer, 2003), even if one of the seven “strategic priorities” identified by the UN Taskforce on Education and Gender Equality as crucial in improving the reach of MDG 3 on “promoting gender equality and empowering women” is to reduce women’s reliance on informal sector work (Grown et al., 2005). Valenzuela (2004: 52-3) examines how anti-poverty programmes in their current form – often using women’s “voluntary” or unpaid labour – can simply add to women’s reproductive burden. This point echoes arguments concerning the adverse effects of the “feminization” of anti-poverty initiatives such as Conditional Cash Transfer programmes made in recent feminist academic work in a variety of contexts (see Bradshaw, 2008; Chant, 2007a; Mayoux, 2006; Molyneux, 2006; also Valenzuela, ed., 2004). As employment is frequently the single most important “asset” possessed by households to overcome poverty (see González de la Rocha, 2001, 2007; Moser, ed., 2007), anti-poverty programmes need to concentrate on increasing women’s competencies and employability, while taking into account the gendered nature of the care economy (see also Budlender, 2004; Elson, 1999, 2004).

There is widespread reference in ILO literature about the urgent need to take into account women’s reproductive responsibilities and their access to decent work in the labour market (e.g. ILO 2007e; Abe et al. 2003; Abramo, 2003; Chen et al., 2002; Lund

<sup>3</sup> Prevailing neo-liberal policy frameworks emphasising free markets, a reduced role for the public sector and uninhibited international flows of capital and goods (but not labour), could be replaced with alternative approaches with the potential to ‘secure economic stability without sacrificing the welfare of working people or entrenching existing gender inequalities’ (Heintz, 2006: iii).

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and Srinivas, 2000; Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Sorj 2004; Hein 2005, Kim and Kim 2004; Kusakabe 2006;). For example, in the Latin American context, Bruschini with Lombarda (2000: 189) note that the new contingent of women workers is older and married, but this has not divested them of their maternal obligations. While women spend several hours a day on unpaid tasks which limits their involvement in remunerated labour (Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Valenzuela, 2003b), domestic work is still not counted as “work” (Bruschini with Lombarda, 2000: 189). There remains a persistent association between women and reproduction and men and production (Abramo and Todaro, 2002; Bruschini with Lombarda, 2000; Chávez O’Brien, 2003; Valenzuela, 2003b). Women are still seen as “secondary workers” (Todaro et al., 2000: 259). Various authors thus draw attention to the need for public policies which are not only targeted to employment, but also education (Rangel, 2005; Valenzuela, 2000b); childcare and other family responsibilities (e.g. Cassirer and Addati, 2007; ILO 2007e; Hein, 2005; Heymann 2004, Abramo, 2003; Cortés, 2003; Farah, 2003; Heikel, 2000; Rangel, 2005), social protection in old age beyond pension reform (Bertranou, 2006) and social dialogue (Valenzuela, 2000b). With respect to childcare, some ILO studies usefully emphasize the importance of interrogating the persistent association of women with childcare. For example, Todaro (2002a: 229) coins the term “mater-paternidad” (literally mother-fatherhood) to impress how parenting should not only be regarded as a woman’s concern (see also Abramo and Todaro, 2002). A number of ILO studies also call on states, employers and trade unions to do more to assume their collective responsibilities for establishing policy and workplace frameworks that enable workers to reconcile their work and family responsibilities in ways that enable men to have more options to increase their participation in the family and care, and women to participation in paid economic activities on more equal terms with men (e.g. Hein 2005, Kusakabe 2006, Sorj 2004).

### ***Research gaps, implications and future directions***

Notwithstanding the strength of this analysis, it would be useful to pay greater attention to the significance of the “care economy” with respect to the gendered dimensions of the informal economy. For example, ILO studies could examine the gendered operation of “global care chains”, as well as global value or commodity chains, and their interrelationships, in informal work. Global care chains indicate “a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring” (Hochschild, 2000: 131). Analysis of care chains would shed further light on the gendered, classed and racialized relations of power structuring the reproductive division of labour transnationally and how these condition and constrain women’s participation in local and international labour markets. It is important that this gender analysis take an explicitly intersectional approach, asking how differently-located groups of women are included within and affected by global care and value chains differentially, on account of their social and geo-political locations. It is important to pay attention to the distribution of care work, through tracing changes in family forms over time, including the existence of non-normative family structures and living arrangements and how they relate to reproductive work. Some of these issues could be addressed through small-scale empirical and qualitative work looking at specific contexts and groups in the informal economy.

### **Regulatory environment including promotion of international labour standards and core rights**

#### ***Overview and key findings***

With respect to regulatory frameworks, ILO research explores how it may be possible to “simplify the repressive or constraining aspects” of the law while also enhancing “the

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protective, standards-related and beneficial aspects” for those working in the informal economy (ILO, 2002b: 6; see also Schlyeter, 2002). On the one hand, legalization can promote entrepreneurialism and facilitate formalization through “simplifying the regulations and procedures for doing business, improving the transparent and consistent application of rules and procedures and reducing transaction costs” (ILO, 2002b: 6). A very useful case in point is provided by the Chilean Law of Family Micro-enterprises (Ley de Microempresas Familiares) which is amply covered in ILO research on Latin America (see for example, Valenzuela et al., eds, 2006). Introduced in 2002, this law relaxed restrictions on domestic enterprise such that any legitimate economic activity may be carried out from home provided it does not produce contamination. Although the law has not succeeded in as many registrations as hoped for, by 2005, a significant 2000 micro-enterprises in Chile had been formalized (Allan and Reinecke, 2006: 95; see also González, 2006).

Another issue is for “legalization ... [to] ... involve a reform of labour legislation and labour administration to give priority to the full application in the informal economy ... of the fundamental principles and rights at work” (ILO, 2002b: 6). Determining how regulatory systems can best be developed and employed to promote and enforce International Labour Standards and human rights is particularly important for addressing pervasive gender inequalities (including those associated with bonded and child labour) as well as practical and strategic gender needs and interests (Chant, 2007c; Molyneux, 1984, 2001; Moser, 1993) within informal work. Child rights represent a major gender issue given the disproportionate involvement of young girls in unpaid and paid domestic work (Carcedo, 2004; Soto, 2004; see also Chant, 2007a; Chant and Jones, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2007), not to mention the sex industry (see Lin, 1998; IPEC, 2005; Salas and Campos; also Chant and McIlwaine, 1995).

Recent ILO research and technical cooperation projects have sought to integrate “a right-based approach into a comprehensive and multi-component programme of action” (ILO, 2007a: 10; see, also, for example, ILO, 2007c for discussion of efforts to address gender equality and informality through a rights-based approach in the Arab region). ILO standards, including the ILO Declaration of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and other international instruments, such as the MDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action + 10 and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), “provide a solid international basis for extending rights to the informal economy” (ILO, 2002b: 8). Addressing rights deficits in informal work thus requires analysis of how “standards are actually expressed and enforced through national law and practice on a gradual and selective basis” (ibid.: 8). In many countries, “labour legislation is designed to protect “employees” rather than “workers” and to apply only where there are clear employer–employee relationships” (ibid.: 28). This problem is particularly relevant with respect to the difficulties in determining the particular employer(s) responsible for protecting the rights of “disguised wage workers” in global value chains, especially those at the bottom of the chain, many of whom are female homeworkers (Chen et al., 2002; see also Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2002; Rossignotti, 2006). As the ILO literature emphasizes with respect to the position of homeworkers, their employers treat them as if they were self-employed and therefore do not contribute to their social protection, but in reality these workers are often totally dependent on a single enterprise or employer for their equipment, raw materials and orders (ILO, 2002b: 48).

### ***Research gaps, implications and future directions***

In this context, there is scope for focussed, national level ILO research which reviews “existing labour legislation to identify a) ways to extend them to cover informal workers, and b) where additional legislation might be required” (Chen et al., 2002: 31). With respect to the selective enforcement of international standards and rights, it would be useful to

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examine the gendered implications of which labour standards and rights are more likely to be monitored and enforced, in particular national contexts. Feminist research has shown that when international human rights directives are signed up to by different countries it is those elements dealing specifically with gender equality which consistently fall by the wayside, remaining ineffectively monitored and widely unenforced (Charlesworth and Chinkin, 2000; Peters and Wolper, eds., 1994). Indeed, “women’s rights” have often not been seen as “human rights”. A salient example here is that the ILO Convention 177 on homework, which establishes minimum labour standards for home-based workers (the majority of whom are poor women), has, at the time of writing, only ratified by five countries (Albania, Finland, Ireland, Argentina and the Netherlands) (Rossignotti, 2006: 207).

In this vein, an important avenue for future ILO research will be to explore different strategies for improving monitoring and enforcement of legislation and directives with respect to the informal economy including those that have gender-specific implications. One key concern here is to assess what indicators and/or measures are necessary to measure progress or set-backs on the road to gender equality in the world of work (Tomei, 2006) and how, and by whom, “progress” should defined be monitored. Vega Gramunt (2004) suggests that universities might become “permanent social observatories”, along with local and government agencies, with universities also opening up more to the community and collaborating with projects and groups to strengthen their demands. Chen et al. (2002), moreover, explore how to involve organizations of informal workers, including diverse groups of women, in negotiations around setting, monitoring and enforcing standards. Further analysis on how regional economic integration initiatives can contribute to this task (see Oxman, 2006), including opportunities for South–South solidarity in monitoring labour standards and rights, would be particularly useful. There is of course also the question of how employers’ organizations play a more effective role in this area. Ongoing analysis of global value chains across specific sectors from a gender perspective would help to delineate the specific regulatory and rights issues/deficits affecting different groups of workers along the chain (with an emphasis on female homeworkers, street vendors and agricultural workers at the bottom of the chain) and would help to put greater pressure on employers to remain accountable to all employees involved in the production processes they initiate and manage. ILO studies might also focus on the opportunities and limitations of corporate responsibility initiatives from a gendered perspective, given pervasive, institutionalized gender inequalities. Particular reference to the gendered implications of voluntary codes of conduct with respect to global value chains could be explored (Carr and Chen 2002; Chen et al., 2004, ILO, 2002b; see also Pearson, 2007).

## **Entrepreneurship, skills, microfinance and market access**

A wide-range of ILO literature addresses issues of entrepreneurship, skills, microfinance and market access with respect to informal work. Several of these studies identify specific gendered dimensions and concerns. We review existing research with respect to each thematic area in subsections below.

### ***Entrepreneurship***

#### **Overview and key findings**

ILO literature explores a range of innovative ways to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through various entrepreneurship development programmes. Emphasis is placed on the “need to adopt a strategy of focusing on certain subsectors/clusters



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benefiting the most marginalized and socially excluded groups, including youth and women” (ILO, 2007a: 11). The necessity of adapting “tools and outreach mechanisms to the broad diversity of the informal economy units and entrepreneurs, through attention to issues such as family businesses, less visible outlets, lower educational attainments, gender, ethnicity and other related constraints” is highlighted (ibid.). The ILO has focused on developing specific research and programmes to support women who want to become entrepreneurs, including the Women’s Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equity Programmes (WEDGE). Such work acknowledges the need to address the multiple “levels of mutually reinforcing constraints on female micro-enterprise” (i.e. access to resources and property; income; credit; skills; marketing; labour; and general underlying constraints on change) (Mayoux, 2006: 54; see also Chen et al., 2004; El-Solh, 2003; ILO, 2002b: 97). The absence of legal property rights is identified as a key constraint on women’s entrepreneurialism. In some national contexts, “there may be overt discrimination in state legislation whereby women are treated as minors under the authority of fathers, husbands, brothers or sons for the whole of their lives or, more commonly, the inequality is enshrined in common law” (ILO, 2002b: 114–5; see also Aliber, 2002; Carr and Chen, 2002). Women’s lack of access to legal property rights, including intellectual property, means that, as potential entrepreneurs, they are “not able to use, build, recombine or exchange their assets in the most productive way in order to generate additional value” (ILO, 2002b: 113).

A number of studies examine particular gendered aspects of entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise in further depth. In the Latin American context, Fernández-Pacecho (2003b: 180) discusses the growing concentration of women in informal economy in relation to three main types: (i) “subsistence informality” (own account and unpaid work); (ii) “subordinated informality” (subcontracting); (iii) informality associated with small scale firms with five or fewer employees. Moreover, some ILO studies point up the different profits from female and male-run micro-enterprises, and differences in investment patterns. For example, men tend to be less risk-averse than women (Reinecke et al., 2006: 35–6; see also Aliber, 2002; Chant, 2007a: Chapter 5 on The Gambia). There is also some welcome analysis of specific national and regional initiatives aimed at addressing gender issues with respect to entrepreneurship and informality, including the Chilean Law of Family Micro-enterprises discussed previously, as well as primary research undertaken by the ILO on gender and informal economy issues in a range of Arab states which examines how gender equality and workers’ rights legislation can become entry points for ensuring better social protection and security for informal workers (Charmes, 2007; Destremau, 2007; Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007; ILO, 2007c, d).

## Research gaps, implications and future directions

Further research in this area might examine the gender differences in access to finance for business start-ups, along with the use/destination of income/profits from work (Chant, 2007a) and how these affect longevity, size and growth of informal enterprises. Studies might also pay closer attention to the role of “non-labour” resources (e.g. land, property and other assets) in informal enterprise (Chant, 1996, 2007c; Moser, ed, 2007), addressing women’s difficulties in accessing even rental accommodation in their own right in some contexts (Vera-Sanso, 2006a). Further analysis of gendered constraints on use of space, domestically and beyond the home and neighbourhood, as well as the need to address women’s care burdens and “reproductive tax” (Palmer, 1995; see also ILO, 2004b) would also be useful in assessing the complex limitations and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs (Chen, 2007; Kantor, 2002; Lessinger, 1990; Miraftab, 1996; Valenzuela, 2005; Vera-Sanso, 1995). Future studies could also address the effects of competition (between women and women and women and men) within the informal economy on women (and other marginalized) entrepreneurs. For example, Nelson (1997) examines how women’s informal opportunities have been eroded by men’s colonization of beer-brewing in Nairobi (Nelson, 1997). Moreover, Chant with Craske (2003) explore how

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limited skills and start-up capital produce a situation in which women in low-income neighbourhoods are forced into similar ventures (e.g. small-scale production of perishable consumer items) which drive prices and profits down. The “discouraged worker effect” which this produces can result in women dropping out of the labour force altogether (see also Standing, 1999). Intersectional relations of power which position different groups of women (and men) in differing relations of privilege and marginality to one another in the labour market also remains important. As Lund and Srinivas (2000: 115), point out, paying attention to intersections of gender, class and ethnicity (among other variable) is crucial in order to assess “the conditions under which workers in the informal economy, and in particular women, sometimes compete and sometimes cooperate”.

## **Skills development and training**

### Overview and key findings

ILO literature identifies improving the skills and competencies of informal economy workers as “key to their ability to access gainful jobs, improve productivity and income” (ILO, 2007a: 11; see also Gallart, 2002)). Yet, formal training systems have proven inadequate to reach out to and meet the needs of informal economy workers, especially poor women who may be isolated in their homes, may not have access to training facilities, and/or may be constrained in participating in training by (patriarchal) social and cultural norms and attitudes (ibid.; see also Haan, 2007; ILO, 2007c; Kuskabe et al., 2004; Liimatainen, 2002; Murray, 2006; Suriasarn and Resurreccion, 2003). Moreover, as noted by Silveira (2005) and Silveira and Matosas (2003), training can encourage entrepreneurialism and cooperation, but may not lead the generation of actual opportunities for employment.

ILO research and technical cooperation have explored how community-based training programmes (CBT) can address these issues. The ILO has developed a specific methodology, Training for Local Economic Empowerment (TREE), which has been applied in several countries (Chaturvedi, 2005; ILO, 2002b). The methodology takes a vocational focus, emphasizing the identification of potential wage and self-employment opportunities and their training and non-training requirements before organizing and providing training and post-training support services to poor and/or disadvantaged individuals in communities. Evidence shows that successful vocational training for informal workers “combine skills and acquisition and upgrading with practising production and income-generation activities within broader and multi-component training for entrepreneurship development, such as through establishing and managing cooperatives and producers’ associations and access to finance, technology and markets” (ILO, 2002b: 12).

Recent ILO studies highlight the need for vocational training to take a more holistic approach, through incorporating training in more general life and work skills, and focusing on empowerment (Haan, 2007; Gallart, 2002; Murray, 2006; Liimatainen, 2002; Silveira and Matosas, 2003). As Haan (2007: vii) comments, “there is growing awareness that the informally employed, and especially casual and homeworkers, also need other skills since their absorption and mobility in the labour market is limited by their illiteracy, lack of core work skills and lack of employment”. Murray (2006: 10) notes, furthermore, that “informal workers, and especially women, would benefit significantly from “empowering” skills, ranging from negotiation skills to knowledge of their legal rights, and organization skills so that they can participate in associations that can lobby on their behalf”.

ILO research examines a number of useful case studies where CBT programmes have been employed with specific attention to gender issues. For example, Chaturvedi (2005) provides an analysis of lessons learned through the implementation of a “gender-sensitive” CBT project in Bangladesh. This particular initiative offered a holistic programme with

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interlinked elements addressing “issues of planning, capacity development and institutional linkages for CBT, the social and gender dimensions, market and demand issues, training and post-training aspects and the policy implications of CBT” (ibid: 3). A central conclusion emerging from the project experience is that “a comprehensive approach is most relevant and that confidence building and empowerment training must be an integral part of technical and business training initiatives addressing socially and economically disadvantaged groups” (ibid.: 4; see also Kusakabe et al., 2004 on Cambodia; Suiyasarn and Resurreccion, 2003 on Thailand). Furthermore, looking at the Latin American context, Silveira and Matosas (2003) review the vocational training programme FORMUJER (Programa Regional de Fortalecimiento de la Formación Técnica y Profesional de Mujeres de Bajos Ingresos / Strengthening of Technical and Professional Training of Low-income Women), which was coordinated by Cinterfor/OIT with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and has been implemented through agencies in Argentina, Bolivia and Costa Rica. These initiatives take the form of building capacity in national institutions such that low-income women have a more positive training experience, appropriate to a macroeconomic context in which there is increasing emphasis on the need for people to be adaptable, flexible, multi-skilled (“polyvalent”), and to receive ongoing training and re-training. The programmes nominally encourage communication and feedback between institutions and individuals (as well as within those groups), such that training starts with where the women are at, identifying how they are affected by gendered relations of power in their particular context, and in the labour market specifically, and builds on those so that women are encouraged to construct occupational projects, and ultimately provided with training which accords with their needs and aspirations.<sup>4</sup>

Some ILO studies emphasize the need to apply a critical gender perspective (which focuses on gendered relations of power) to addressing issues of skills development and training in the informal economy. For example, Murray (2006: 8–9) underscores the importance of targeted “efforts to encourage women to participate in education, training, productive employment, or even male-dominated occupations”, as well as broader initiatives to better understand and tackle the gender inequalities “embedded in the state, the market, the community and at the household level” (ibid.: 7) through which problematic gendered roles, jobs, skills and expectations are (re)produced (see also Kusakabe et al., 2004; Suriyasarn and Resurreccion, 2003). As she notes, in order to address the challenge of incorporating women into non-traditional areas of work, “we need to develop skills for women so that they can earn a decent income, rather than concentrate on products and services that are currently filling a saturated market” (ibid.: 10). However, in order to ensure such efforts are effective, “the very concept of female and male employment areas must be revised” (ibid: 10). This is a particularly important point given that trainers involved in enabling skills development among informal workers often “have traditional views about the roles of men and women” (Suriyasarn and Resurreccion, 2003: xi). In this respect, Murray usefully notes the importance of “advocacy and sensitizing on all levels” in order to “help build public support for new economic roles for women, both before and after training activities”, including “targeted work with the media with respect to gender and training” (ibid: 10; see also Suriyasarn and Resurreccion, 2003: xii). It is hoped that the ILO’s Recommendation 195 concerning Human Resource Development, Education, Training and Lifelong Learning will provide an effective tool for facilitating “research on human resources and development training, which could include identifying and overcoming gender bias in the assessment of competencies” (among other issues) (ibid.: 11).

<sup>4</sup> This study also touches upon a similar programme implemented in Uruguay known as PROIMUJER (Programa de la Igualdad de Oportunidades en el Empleo y la Formación/ Programme of Equality of Opportunity in Employment and Training), funded by the Junta Nacional de Empleo del Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social (Silveira and Matosas, 2003).

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## Research gaps, implications and future directions

Further research in this area might seek to explore in further depth the factors determining gendered occupational paths/trajectories in particular cultural and geo-political contexts. Accepting the point that gender differences in informal activities often reflect gender stereotypes and socialization (Valenzuela, 2005: 18), looking at the Asian context, Mehrotra and Biggeri (2002) note that young girls and boys tend to follow in mother's and father's footsteps respectively. How can such factors be better mapped and addressed within ILO research and technical cooperation? More critical attention might also be paid to addressing the operation and effects of gendered relations of power in the design, implementation and facilitation of training programmes for informal workers, including curriculum development, course offerings, recruitment, post-training support, and, importantly, the gender training of trainers (see also Silveira and Matosas, 2004; also Mukhopadhyay and Wong, eds, 2007 for a recent discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of dominant approaches to gender training in development). Furthermore, with respect to bolstering links between training and successful employment trajectories, there is clear a need for follow-up studies of training programmes which evaluate the actual impacts of particular programmes for poor women (and other marginalized groups). Have such programmes resulted in women receiving new and appropriate training for enhancing their position in work? What are the results on the earning trajectories of female beneficiaries? What evidence is there that training has worked with respect to the development of new business start-ups among women or in relation to the generation of greater empowerment and agency in different spaces, such as home, community, the workplace and politics? Moreover, more effort could also be made to ensure that publications dealing with skills development and training identify and address sector-specific skills developed through particular training initiatives. For example, while Silveira and Matosas (2003) provide a lengthy and useful review of the vocational training programme FORMUJER, not one specific sectoral skill is actually identified in their analysis. Finally, given the "high-tech" economic growth processes taking place in a range of countries and contexts, more attention could also be paid to the potential for training women (and other marginalized groups) in the area of informal and communication technologies (ICTs) (Silveira and Matosas, 2003; Todaro et al., 2000).

## **Microfinance**

### Overview and key findings

ILO literature identifies access to finance as often "the most important single factor creating an enterprise, keeping it going and maintaining jobs" (ILO, 2002b: 115). Microfinance institutions are seen to have the potential to "play a key role in facilitating access to financial services and to the mainstream resources and services" for informal economy workers (ILO, 2007a: 14). A small number of studies examine gendered implications of informal finance initiatives in some depth (Aliber, 2002; Gallart, 2002). On the basis of two empirical studies in India and Uganda, for example, Aliber (2002: 45) notes "huge disparities in women's and men's use of different types of financial services". While "women are more apt to depend on friends and family for loans than other sources, and in particular to make less use than men of money lenders and commercial banks", women invest less to start their enterprises, and tend to borrow less than men from corresponding sources (including friends and families) (ibid.).

Moreover, the increasing commercialization and formalization of financial services "appears to have a strong gender dimension ... [and] are gradually 'captured' by entrepreneurs who are mainly men" (ibid.). While informal finance will likely continue to be a key source of finance for women entrepreneurs, "the fact of its limitations and not altogether favourable evolution serve to reinforce the importance of the mission of MFIs

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and banks to improve their services to such individuals” (ibid.). The women-oriented group lending schemes of Kampala’s MFIs and bank-linked daily deposit collectors in India are identified as examples where this is happening in potentially promising ways (ibid.). As Gallart (2002) notes, however, emphasis on improving poor women’s access to microfinance and credit is misplaced unless more attention is paid to “functional illiteracies” which obstruct women’s access to markets.

## Research gaps, implications and future directions

More research on the gendered dimensions of microfinance and microcredit in general would be useful, as there is surprisingly little existing ILO analysis in this area. Research might consider the limitations of micro-credit when directed only to women without awareness of intra-domestic relations (Kabeer, 2003; Mayoux, 2006) and, linked to this, the problems associated with male resentment of women-only credit projects (ILO, 2004b). Analysis should also foreground the acknowledgement that improving women’s access to micro-credit is not sufficient to ensure their success as entrepreneurs – better infrastructure, social services and assistance to ease caring burdens are also essential (see Chant, 2007a, c; Grown et al., 2005).

## **Market access**

### Overview and key findings

ILO literature argues that “a collaborative effort on the part of grassroots organizations of those who work in the informal economy with sympathetic representatives of non-governmental, research, government, private sector, and international development organizations is needed to enable the most vulnerable segments of society to seize [market] opportunities” in the informal economy (ILO, 2007a). Carr and Chen (2002: 19) suggest that in order for informal workers to be able to grasp new opportunities offered by globalization, as well as respond effectively to the negative aspects associated with the liberalization of trade and investment, “it will be necessary to implement the four-fold interrelated strategies: direct action programmes; focused research and statistics; local and international organizing of informal workers and relevant policy dialogues”. Special attention needs to be paid within such strategies to the most marginalized groups of workers in the informal economy, including female homeworkers. In order to benefit from new work opportunities in context of globalization, homeworkers need increased bargaining power and more secure contracts.

ILO policy documents point to the “numerous fair and/or ethical trade initiatives that seek through networking and alliances between companies and/or NGOs in the industrial countries and local producers in developing countries to increase the access of informal and small producers to international markets, promote better trading conditions, better remuneration and raise consumer awareness” (ILO, 2007a: 14). The literature identifies that there are “good practices emerging that seem to show the positive impact in stabilizing incomes of small producers especially women or indigenous and tribal people’s formalizing cooperatives and extracting investment funds for infrastructure and social spending” (ibid.: 15). Despite their positive potential however, such initiatives have “had a very limited outreach so far” and remain both scattered and “heavily dependent on the intermediary and sponsoring events” (ibid.). Carr and Chen (2002) consider the effectiveness of action programmes designed specifically to help women take advantage of economic opportunities. One promising example is the “Women’s Trade Centre” being developed by SEWA “to test how thousands of grassroots rural women produces can be assisted to link directly with international markets” . This initiative aims “to: (a) create global networking and partnerships for micro-entrepreneurs; (b) provide inputs regarding consumer preferences and market trends; and (c) create market linkages through e-commerce and other channels” (ibid.). SEWA see the Women’s Trade Centre as “a

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“buffer”, which absorbs the pulls and pressures of market forces and also guides and helps grassroots women to carve out a niche in the market” (ibid; see also Renaud and Blain, 2004). Another important initiative covered by ILO literature is the Rural Women’s Association of Uruguay (AMRU), a grassroots association which has developed links across different parts of the country and now participates in successful cooperative production on a national scale (Chiappe, 2005; Chiappe, ed., 2005; García y Santos, 2005).

## Research gaps, implications and future directions

Further research in this area should concentrate on producing follow-through studies of the effects of various initiatives designed to create greater market access for marginalized groups within the informal economy. Such studies could form the basis for the development of regional best practice guides. Further detailed analysis of global commodity chains, as well as global care chains, will provide a basis for identifying points of access to particular markets for marginalized groups. Moreover, the ILO could produce research on specific groups of informal economy workers who are particularly affected by global supply chains, e.g. domestic workers and home workers.

## ***Extension of social security and protection***

### Overview and key findings

Examining how social security and protection can be extended to workers in the informal economy remains a priority within ILO research. The “social protection deficit” is understood to be “especially critical for those in the informal economy, not only because of their job and income insecurity, but also because of the greater likelihood of their being exposed to serious occupational safety and health hazards” (ILO, 2002b: 8; see also ILO, 2007a). Poor women, and especially homeworkers, domestic workers, agricultural workers, migrant workers, sex workers and those working in (other) hazardous jobs, are among “the most vulnerable and unprotected groups of workers” (ILO, 2002b: 8; see also Carr and Chen, 2002, Chen et al., 2002; ILO 2003a, b, d; Lund and Srinivas, 2000). ILO studies note, furthermore, that “recent social and demographic changes (reflected in migration, divorce, female-headed households, demographic ageing and general and infant mortality patterns) have left more and more women with heavier burdens and fewer means to care for themselves and their families” (ILO, 2002b: 56). The increased reproductive burden on women has been reinforced globally by the shift towards a receding role of the state, including the diminishing provision of public health and social care, under the auspices of a dominant neo-liberal economic policy paradigm (Chant with Craske, 2003; Elson, 1998; Lind, 2002; Molyneux, 2001, 2006; Perrons, 2004).

ILO research assesses the various strategies to extend social security coverage to those who are not covered by existing schemes which have been employed, with varying degrees of success, in different countries. These include “measures such as gradual extension of social insurance schemes, the introduction of special arrangements for informal economy workers, the provision of non-contributory social pensions, the development of programmes combining cash transfer and access to education and health, and employment guarantee schemes” (ILO, 2007a: 12). The gendered challenges of extending social protection to workers in the informal economy are particularly pronounced with respect to migrant workers, because of their precarious position (Bach, 2003; Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007; ILO, 2007a; see also ILO Women and Migration Series), and in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa (and other parts of the world), as well as in a range of conflict/and post-conflict zones (Ambert et al., 2007). Based on recent analysis and evidence of social protection issues in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the ILO “is currently promoting basic universal social security benefits as one of the central themes of its global campaign for the extension of social security for all” and is in the process of “developing an analytical tool for governments and social partners that

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allows them to explore the financial and fiscal feasibility of a range of basic benefits” (ILO, 2007a: 12). As has been highlighted by recent primary research conducted by the ILO in a range of Arab states, it is crucial that such tools and analysis integrate and enable a critical gender perspective on social security and protection (Destremau, 2007; Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007; ILO, 2007 c, d).

In a major study published as part of the ILO’s Strategies and Tools Against Social Exclusion and Poverty (STEP) programme, Lund and Srinivas (2000) seek to develop a gendered approach to social protection for workers in the informal economy. As a means to assist in the extension of systems of social protection to poor women, the authors flesh out “a new conceptual approach, based on an analysis of institutions, and grounded inter alia in subsectors, on typologies of risk associated with different subsectors, and with different types of employment status, and different stages in the life cycle” (ibid.: 2). This approach, and the notion of a multi-stranded informal-formal work continuum, provides a promising critical framework within which to develop “gendered analysis of all actors in the systems of social protection, whether the position of individual women and men, or households of alternative collective institutions” (ibid.: 12), which can be applied on a sector-by-sector basis. It enables analysis of “how far and under what conditions ... existing mechanisms [can] be made to penetrate towards the less formal and less protected end of the work continuum ... where more women are in low paid work, or in family or self employment” and, in turn, “how far down each sectoral strand or chain we can extend existing measures for protection, or introduce new ones” (ibid.: 13). Furthermore, conceptualizing possibilities for the extension of social protection in this way provides a “way to unbundle the “informal economy”, and thereby offers a means to cope with the sense that “this problem is so overwhelming, and the people so many, that nothing can be done” (ibid).

A number of other ILO studies examine particular gendered dimensions of social protection in further depth, including working hours and family/life balance (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2005); community-based health financing-schemes and the extension of maternity protection for women in the informal economy (ILO, 2003a); gendered differentials in social security payments (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2006; Silveira and Matosas, 2003); “positive and negative discrimination” in social security benefits for women (Destremau with Abi Yaghi, 2007); and pensions, including analysis of how women less protected by pensions in old age than men, largely due to their shorter and more interrupted working lives, lower pay, and disproportionate involvement in the informal economy (Bertranou, 2006; see also Chant with Craske, 2003: Chapter 8). Issues raised on safe maternity (ILO 2007e) point to the needs of workers who are outside of legal and social protection systems. Particular ILO studies have, moreover, examined innovative approaches to extending social protection which seek to address gendered relations of power in particular contexts, for example, in Chile, the System of Social Protection (SCHS/Chile Solidario), which works with families in extreme poverty in holistic manner (for example, providing psycho-social support and preferential access to public programmes) and gives a “family stipend” to women (see Feres, 2005; Henriquez and Reca, 2005; Riquelme and Valenzuela, 2005).

## Research gaps, implications and future directions

Notwithstanding the many sophisticated and innovative elements of the research on the gendered dimensions of social security and protection discussed above, there remains a need to account for women’s reproductive work more substantively in ILO literature. A number of studies from the Conditions of Work and Employment Programme have addressed reconciling work and family (Abe et al. 2003; Hein, 2005; Sorj, 2004; Kim et al., 2004; Kusakabe 2006) Lund and Srinivas (2000: 13), acknowledge, the conceptual approach developed in their study “does not resolve the problem of how to integrate unpaid labour, or “the care economy”” (see also Budlender, 2004; Elson, 1999, 2004).

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Reproductive work in the home, which is carried out mostly by women, is not incorporated directly within the continuum, but is rather seen as “undergirding it” (Lund and Srinivas, 2000: 13). As Lund and Srinivas (2003: 13) argue, if “we integrate it [women’s unpaid reproductive work], for the purposes of actually exploring mechanisms of social protection, we open up this exploration of social protection for women in the informal economy to an impossible extent”. The theoretical and practical challenges of addressing women’s unpaid reproductive work from a social protection perspective should not be underestimated. Future ILO research might continue to address this issue through interrogating the gendered reproductive/productive dichotomy, conducting empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative) of women’s reproductive labour, analysing the gendered nature and operation of global care chains (Hochschild, 2000), and considering the gendered dimensions of the intertwining of working and living conditions (see Chen, 2007; Jhabvala, 2007; Weiliwita et al., 2007).

## **Organization, representation and social dialogue**

### Overview and key findings

ILO literature maintains that organization, representation and dialogue is essential to informal workers’ ability to pursue their employment rights and interests through “bargaining collectively or lobbying with politicians and bureaucrats on concerns relating to legislation, access to infrastructure, property rights, social security, environmental concerns and so on” (ILO, 2002b: 8; see also Chen et al., 2002; ILO, 2002a; Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005). Attaining representational security, which “is based on the freedom of workers and employers to form and join organizations of their own choosing without fear of reprisal or intimidation” (ILO 2002b: 71), thus remains crucial for informal economy workers. Women working in the informal economy are identified as being “especially without voice”, as they generally face greater barriers to participating in organizational processes due to their “multiple roles and responsibilities in the workplace and the home” (ibid.: 72). Moreover, within mixed-sex organizations, functions and positions tend to be influenced by gender so that women are under-represented in decision-making processes (ibid).

ILO research emphasizes the role of “national and local governments and the framework of law and governance” in protecting and enforcing the right to organization and voice for informal workers (ILO, 2002b: 8). As “a number of countries still prohibit the independent formation of any type of organization by all or specified categories of workers, or limit the freedom of workers and employers to form and join organizations of their choice” (ibid.: 71), pressure needs to be put on national governments by both international bodies and local groups to address these critical rights deficits. However, granting informal workers the “right to join or create organizations of their choosing” (ibid.: 75) is not a sufficient means of enabling effective representation of their concerns. National and local governments, as well as international bodies, must also address the multiple challenges informal workers face in organizing and communicating with appropriate institutions and groups: “A major problem faced by informal economy workers is their lack of defined interface with whom they need to dialogue. Often they are not recognized by public authorities and have to rely on established trade unions of employers’ organizations to speak on their behalf” (ibid.; see also Carr and Chen, 2002).

The challenges associated with organizing are particularly intense for female home-based workers, who remain isolated from their employers, other workers, and relevant local and community groups. In this vein, ILO research emphasizes that “recruitment strategies to reach workers in informal activities have to be innovative, particularly when access to the workplace is denied or the workplace is unknown or hard to locate” (ibid.: 80). A recently completed four-country case study on organizing informal economy



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workers in West Africa highlights strategies to overcoming constraints that make it difficult for trade unions to extend their traditional activities to informal economy workers (ILO/Ghana Trades Union Congress, 2008). It is suggested that the “women’s department in trade unions can play a key role in reaching out to women in the informal economy” (ibid.: 81). Detailed analysis of global value chains can also enable “unions to identify potential members who are disguised wage workers in home-based work and subcontracting arrangements and at the same time to determine the real employer ... who should ultimately bear responsibility for the rights and protection of all the workers in the chain” (ibid.: 81; see also Carr and Chen, 2002).

The difficulties in including and representing informal workers which trade unions have experienced, due, in part, to their institutional and membership structures and practices, are examined in a small number of ILO studies (ILO, 2002b; Rodríguez, 2006; Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005). In many cases, organizing to include informal workers implies changing the way unions operate. ILO studies also consider the opportunities and challenges in promoting the representation of informal workers encountered by regional workers’ and employers’ organizations in Africa, East Asia, South East Asia, Latin America and the Arab Region (ILO, 2002, 2007a). In addition, the role and potential of range of organizations are examined, including those advocating for informal women’s workers, such as WIEGO, StreetNet, and HomeNet (Carr and Chen, 2002; Chen et al., 2002), social enterprise and cooperative movements (ILO, 2002b; see also Chiappe, 2005, ed. 2005; García y Santos, 2005; Vega Gramunt, 2004), and consumer and human rights groups (ILO, 2002b). The need for enhancing international forms of organization for informal workers is particularly pronounced given that increasing economic integration (and particularly multinational corporations and global value chains) has undermined the effectiveness of strategies confined to one country or locality (ILO, 2002b: 85).

### Research gaps, implications and future directions

Despite the emphasis placed on organization, representation and dialogue in ILO research and policy documents (ILO, 2002b, 2007a), only a small number of ILO studies are dedicated specifically to examining these issues with respect to informality (Hein, 2004; Abramo and Rangel, eds, 2005; Rodríguez, 2006; Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005). As such, significant scope exists for research on the gendered dimensions of organization, representation and voice in the informal economy. One avenue for future analysis is the gendered dimensions of trade union organization. In what particular ways do gendered relations of power within trade unions function to exclude or marginalize poor women from representation and decision making within trade unions in specific contexts? Moreover, in what ways do uncritical efforts to promote gender equality within unions (i.e. promoting measures to promote work/family balance as an exclusive concern for women workers, rather than all workers) risk reifying problematic gendered norms and roles? For instance, in examining how gender equality issues might be better addressed within trade unions, a key ILO publication on the informal economy (ILO, 2002b: 81) states: “Special attention also needs to be given to women and youth in the informal economy ... Women need family-friendly measures, such as meetings scheduled to suit their heavy and uncertain work demands and arranging formal childcare. Women also need to see that unions are truly practicing gender equality.”

While the implementation of “family-friendly” measures within trade unions and other forms of collective organizing is important for women, it must also be understood and promoted as essential for men. Otherwise, problematic associations of reproductive work with “women” as a category, and productive work with “men” as a category are reinforced in ways that can only perpetuate an inequitable gendered division of labour of unpaid domestic and care work. (Chant and Gutmann, 2000).

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Further in-depth analysis is also required to address the barriers to and constraints on women's collective organization and political participation more generally (i.e. competition between different groups of workers, gendered time/space constraints and inequalities in reproductive work, women's isolation and individualization in global value chains; gendered social norms and attitudes, gendered violence or threats of violence) and how these might be better addressed both in research and "on the ground". With respect to competition, for example, evidence from a variety of countries suggests that high levels of competition among women and/or between women and men is depressing the scope for collective action (see for example, Adadjanian, 2002 on female street vendors in La Paz, Bolivia; Nelson, 1997 on male-female rivalries over beer brewing in Nairobi, Kenya). One outcome of competition is that women may have little option other than to engage in riskier or less profitable ventures, or to give up working altogether (Chant with Craske, 2003: Chapter 8).

In relation to gendered social norms and attitudes, it is "crucial to acknowledge how sexist and patriarchal attitudes frequently intersect with racism and ethnocentrism to exclude and marginalize particular groups of women" from collective organization and political participation (Pedwell and Perrons, 2007: 19). Moreover, a crucial area of concern which receives little attention in ILO literature in this area is the persistence of gender-based violence as a barrier to participation and organizing. Gendered violence, including domestic and workplace violence is an issue that affects all women (in both Northern and Southern countries); however, poor and rural women often have fewer resources to seek protection than middle class and urban women.

In addition to examining the challenges to women's (and other marginalized groups') collective organizing, it would also be useful to provide more detailed and varied examples, case studies and templates of women's successful organizing with respect to informal economy issues. Within ILO literature, organizations such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), HomeNet, SteetNet and the Uruguayan Association of Rural Women (AMRU) are widely cited as success stories of the potential for social transformation through collective organizing on the part of poor women (Carr and Chen, 2002; Chen et al., 2002; Chiappe, ed, 2005). Such networks provide useful and inspiring examples of how women engaged in informal work can gain access to rights, social protection and markets through collective organizing across regional and national borders. However, there is also a need for analysis of new and different groups and networks in order to show the diverse possibilities of collective organizing across social and geo-political contexts, including more local initiatives (both rural and urban), in order to provide a wider range of possible models of best practice, which advance the boundaries of traditional trade union models. For example, Vega Gramunt (2004) examines how, in the context of the aftermath of the Argentinian economic crisis of 2001-2003, new spaces of protest are being opened up by women's cooperatives. Similarly, looking at Ecuador, Vaillancourt-Laflamme (2005: 66) suggests that, in the context of globalization and its relationship to multifaceted decent work deficits in the country, "it seems that social movements are now advocating for a more fundamental debate on social justice and not only seeking an improvement of labour conditions". For example, "The CONAIE, the FEI and other indigenous and non-indigenous social movements ... are promoting a platform that goes beyond informality, to address, as they say, the causes of informality: the current socio-economic development model". As such "their focus for mobilizing cannot be traditional social democratic processes known as tripartism or social dialogue, but rather society as a whole" (ibid.).

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## **Area-based local development (rural and urban)**

### ***Overview and key findings***

ILO research identifies area-based local development as “one of the potentially most promising strategies for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach for upgrading informal economy workers and economic units and improving their access to mainstream services, social protection and markets” (ILO, 2007a: 15; see also ILO, 2002b). The decentralized local government structures in rural and urban areas are seen to “provide a favourable ground for bringing together the spatial, social and economic dimensions of the informal economy, linking the macroeconomic dimensions with micro-level interventions, the supply side with demand and access to land with access to services and to markets” (ILO, 2007a: 15). Programmes focusing on upgrading informal settlements “including slum upgrading schemes in growing urban centres and basic infrastructure provision for rural areas, are often seen to simultaneously upgrade living and working conditions for informal economy workers” (ibid; see also Valenzuela, 2005). They are identified, furthermore, as having the potential to “facilitate local employment creation especially for disadvantaged youth and women and encourage labour-intensive methods to deliver goods and services” (ILO, 2007a: 15). However, this potential “is not always exploited due to weak governance and capacity of local institutions and unsatisfactory devolution of authority and resources” (ibid.; see also Allan and Reinecke, 2006 and González et al., 2006 on the locally-differentiated success of the application of the Law of Family Enterprises in Chile). A more substantive evaluation of good practices is therefore “necessary to draw lessons for successful strategies which help transition to formality through area-based action” (ILO, 2007a: 15).

### ***Research gaps, implications and future directions***

Future research in this area might address the gendered dimensions of, and constraints on, participatory development in further depth. Within particular participatory development projects and processes, whose voices are being heard and whose interests are being represented? (Cornwall, 2003). How do gendered dynamics constrain poor women’s participation and representation in such processes, as well as those of marginalized groups, and how might such issues be better addressed in ILO research and technical cooperation?

Social constraints on women’s ability to work away from the home, or too far from communities in which they are known, has been documented as significant in a variety of studies (e.g. Kantor, 2002; Lessinger, 1990; Miraftab, 1996; Vera-Sanso, 1995). Added to this are the costs of travelling to and from work, especially where women live in peri-urban communities (Rangel, 2005: 273). In this respect, the availability and efficacy of urban infrastructure such as services, transport remains a crucial area for gender analysis (Chant, 1996, 2007c; Vera-Sanso, 2006b).

The domestic location of much of women’s work also needs much greater interrogation and problematization. For example, Valenzuela (2005: 18) points to the benefits perceived by women at home-based enterprises, allowing them to reconcile paid and unpaid work (e.g. child care, domestic labour), improving their flexibility, reducing overheads (e.g. saving on rent), and reducing expenditure of time and money on travel to work. In this vein, future research might consider the potential for more ICT jobs to become home-based (Silveira and Matosas, 2003; see also Kurian and Munshi, 2003 on “cyber villages” in India). By the same token, as noted by Reinecke et al. (2006: 38), home-based work can reinforce the invisibility and marginalization of women’s work. This is an important point given that home-based work continues to be developing with precarious conditions in respect of social protection, organization and voice (Rossignotti, 2006: 187). As echoed in a study of home-based work in five Asian countries by Mehrotra

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and Biggeri (2002: 3): “Home-based work has a dual and contradictory character: on the one hand, as a source of income diversification for poor workers and the emergence of micro-enterprises, and on the other, the source of exploitation of vulnerable workers as firms attempt to contain costs”. Another issue rarely considered in ILO studies is potential conflicts in the use of dwellings for economic activities, especially given tendencies towards high levels of overcrowding in slum housing and men’s greater power to determine the allocation of space (as well as resources) within the home (see Brickell, 2007; Chant, 2007c).

## **Institutional and practical issues**

In conjunction with our analysis of strengths and potential gaps in ILO research, some key institutional and practical issues emerged through our informal interviews with key officials with respect to the ILO’s ability to effectively commission, produce, circulate and implement critical research and policy initiatives focussing on issues of gender and informality. Synergies with respect to cross-cutting issues such as gender and informality are at times difficult to achieve. Such concerns echo those expressed at an ILO Workshop, “Gender Equality and Decent Work: Towards a Comprehensive Research Strategy”, held in Geneva in May 2007. It was acknowledged here that gender equality is still not mainstreamed in ILO’s research and emphasized the need to support both “women-specific” and “gender-specific” research. Ensuring consistency, coherence and coordination across policy areas was identified as crucial to strengthening ILO research and technical cooperation on gender issues in the informal economy. It was suggested that the ILO should provide further recognition to staff and researchers to incorporate gender issues in their work and analysis as a means to strengthen capacity. From this perspective, it remains crucial to dedicate time and commitment to examining how inter-departmental communication on gender and informality might be improved within the ILO and what incentive structures might be implemented to encourage the development of more holistic and effective strategies and programmes, such as the InFocus Initiative on the Informal Economy.

Linked to this, it is important to ask, not only what issues and areas might be addressed through commissioning new ILO research, but also how existing work might be made better use of within the organization. For example, to what extent are strong studies of the gendered links among globalization, gender, informality, poverty and employment (e.g. Carr and Chen, 2002, 2004; Chen et al., 2002; El-Solh, 2003; Heintz; 2006) actually drawn on and carried through in the ILO’s work? Another concern which emerged from our informal interviews, and which is also echoed within particular ILO publications (e.g. Vaillancourt-Laflamme, 2005), relates to the question of how conducive the ILO tripartite structure itself is to addressing gender issues with respect to informality. A key question from a critical gender perspective are: Whose interests are being represented through tripartite dialogue and whose remain unarticulated or ignored?

## **Synthesis**

Our review of the ILO’s research on women, gender and the informal economy reinforces the ILO’s contention that a holistic and integrated strategy is required to promote gender equality and decent work within informal and formal economies. The key thematic areas with respect to informal work addressed in the report, including growth and productivity, regulatory environment and labour standards, local economic development, entrepreneurship, skills, social security and protection; and organization, representation and dialogue, clearly overlap and mutually reinforce one another. Coordinated efforts to address all areas in tandem are required in order to ensure that gender-sensitive initiatives have a chance of transforming social and economic exclusions, including gendered

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inequalities, on the ground. For example, as we have discussed, anti-poverty programmes which emphasize employment generation will not be effective unless they concentrate on increasing low-income women's competencies and employability, while taking into account the gendered nature of the care economy as well as gendered power relations at domestic, community, local, national and international levels. Promoting women's entrepreneurship will not succeed unless women's lack of access to property rights and capital is addressed. Ensuring low-income women's access to micro-credit will bear little fruit unless appropriate training is provided to address functional illiteracy, better infrastructure and social services are developed, and assistance is provided to ease care burdens.

In order to strengthen the ILO's framework for coordinated technical cooperation across all economic areas and geographic locations, future research programmes should seek to redress thematic, regional and sectoral imbalances in existing research. In particular, while research in the areas of macroeconomic policy, employment, entrepreneurship, skills and market access is fairly comprehensive (although, as we have discussed, there are some key gaps in these literatures which should be addressed), more emphasis needs to be placed on generating studies dedicated to social security and protection and organization, representation and social dialogue from a gender perspective. This point was echoed in our informal interviews, with some ILO officials expressing the opinion that undue emphasis is currently placed on entrepreneurship within the informal economy initiatives, to the detriment of social protection and voice issues. Indeed, even if it is not possible to comply with the strategic priority of reducing women's reliance on informal work advocated by United Nations Taskforce on Education and Gender Equality (Grown et al., 2005), it remains crucial to enhance the conditions of informal work, especially for poor women workers and other marginalized groups. Moreover, as discussed above, increased efforts are required to assess how inter-departmental communication within the ILO can be improved to ensure greater synergy across thematic areas of work, and thereby encourage the development of more comprehensive and effective strategies and programmes.

From an analytical standpoint, more attention should be paid to developing, and consistently applying, a critical gender perspective which interrogates constructions of "women" and "men" as pre-determined or fixed categories and pays careful attention to the operation and effects of gendered relations of power in particular contexts. Furthermore, ILO research should seek to incorporate a more explicitly intersectional perspective which addresses gender in its articulation with a range of other axes of social differentiation, including class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, nation, religion and ability. The significance of sexuality and age, in particular, tend to be elided within the majority of ILO research. From a methodological perspective, ILO studies need to ask more "why" questions which address the root causes of particular inequalities as they pertain to the informal economy and the world of work more generally. Research needs to identify and examine the key sources and effects of discrimination across a range of contexts and consider how such processes may shape individual occupational paths and trajectories. To these ends, ILO research should focus on more primary surveys (both quantitative and qualitative) to complement existing national statistics on employment, the informal economy and gender.

## **Recommendations**

Through assessing particular gaps in ILO research on women, gender and the informal economy we have identified the following key areas in need of future prioritization.

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## **Reproductive/productive (paid or unpaid) work**

The predominance of women in the informal economy requires a thorough analysis of the linkages between women's productive work and reproductive work. Given that family responsibilities continue to fall primarily on women in most societies around the world, women's ability to participate in the paid economy is contingent on their care responsibilities within the home and community. This area of research is of significant importance and which has been receiving increased attention in the ILO. Nevertheless suggested specific research could include the following:

- Analysis which interrogates the gendered reproductive/productive dichotomy and empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative) of women's reproductive work;
- Analysis of the processes that facilitate transition between unpaid (productive) work and paid work.
- Ongoing analysis for improving statistics in the informal economy and particularly sex segregated statistics.

## **Globalization and the informal economy**

The economic changes in the past few decades and the reorganization of production into global production systems have affected the position of women and men in the informal economy differently. Within this context, ILO research could include the following key areas:

- Analysis of the gendered impacts on employment patterns in the informal economy from expanded trade in selected countries /regions.
- Examination of the significance of the "care economy" to the informal economy (including analysis of global care chains and their interrelationships with global commodity chains).
- Analysis of the linkages between irregular migration, gender based vulnerabilities and the informal economy, and analysis of the development impacts of remittances in transforming gender relations in the household and labour market division of labour.
- Analysis of global commodity chains to provide a basis for identifying points of access to particular markets for marginalized groups and follow-through studies on the effects of various initiatives designed to create greater market access for marginalized groups within the informal economy.
- An emerging specific instrument that is gaining currency in terms of advancing labour protection is that of voluntary codes of conduct within the global supply chain. Voluntary agreements drawn up at a company, industry or multi-sector level outline basic social or ethical standards. The scope for this in achieving gender equality and assisting both men and women towards formalization would help the ILO in developing programmes and advising on policies.

## **Rights and regulatory frameworks**

The relationship between law, regulations and their impact on informality is a key policy issue. Three types of legal and institutional frameworks are of importance: labour legislation, business regulations and legal frameworks which secure rights to property, title

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assets and financial capital. All these three areas have a gender dimension and as such any research in the regulatory frameworks need to address the gender differential of their impacts. This is essential for enabling both men and women towards formalization. More detailed areas of research are:

- National-level analysis of how existing labour legislation can be extended to cover different groups of informal workers and where new legislation may be required, and analysis of the gendered implications of which labour standards and rights are more likely to be monitored and enforced than others in particular national contexts.
- Development of strategies for improving the enforcement of gender-relevant legislation and directives with respect to the informal economy (including the development of appropriate indicators and monitoring processes).
- Compile good practices on labour legislation which focus on specifically excluded workers, such as domestic workers, and analyse reasons for success and possibilities for replication. This should include an analysis of implementation of laws as well and with particular reference to the role of labour inspection.
- In terms of business regulations, assess the obstacles women face for opening their own businesses.

### **Improving access to social security**

Social protection coverage to the informal economy workers remains extremely limited. This review has highlighted how women workers are more vulnerable to social exclusion and multiple risks because of their dual productive and reproductive roles. There is a pertinent need for further research in this area. More specifically:

- Compile lessons learnt on successful social security financing in the informal economy covering both men and women and based on occupations or communities.

### **Productivity enhancement through better capabilities and access to resources**

Informal economy workers, both men and women, require an array of services to enable them to either be gainfully employed in the formal sector or to run successful small businesses. This ranges from entrepreneurship development services and skills training among others. While these cannot be successful in isolation of other requirements they are still necessary and as such the following specific research areas could be considered.

### ***Entrepreneurship development***

- Analysis of gender differences in start-up capital, the use of income/profits from work and how these, along with “non-labour” resources such as land, property and infrastructure affect longevity, size and growth of informal enterprises.
- Analysis of the effects of competition (between women and women and women and men) within the informal economy on women (and other marginalized) entrepreneurs.
- Analysis of the factors determining segregated occupational paths in particular cultural and geo-political contexts skills training.

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- Analysis of the operation and effects of gendered relations of power in the design, implementation and facilitation of training programmes, including curriculum development, course offerings, recruitment, post-training support, and the training of trainers.
  - Follow-up analyses of training programmes which evaluate the actual impacts of particular programmes for poor women (and other marginalized groups).
  - Analysis of the gendered dimensions of microfinance and microcredit, including the limitations of micro-credit when directed only to women without awareness of intra-domestic relations.
  - Policy oriented research on the impact of strategies to enhance women's capabilities through skill formation and skill diversification within pro-poor growth frameworks and PRSP.

## **Organization, representation and social dialogue**

The concerns of informal economy workers and particularly women workers can be easily overlooked in the process of policy making and legislative change. As such, organization, representation and social dialogue are valuable means for ensuring that policy development in relation to informal economy take into account the diversity of interests and especially the different interests of men and women. In recent years, efforts have stepped up in enhancing the organization and representation of informal economy workers and units through various strategies. ILO's commitment towards this objective can be further strengthened through focusing on the following areas of research:

- Analysis of the barriers to and constraints on women's collective organization and political participation more generally (i.e. competition between different groups of workers, gendered constraints and inequalities in reproductive work, women's isolation and individualization in global value chains; gendered social norms and attitudes, gendered violence or threats of violence).
- More detailed and varied examples, case studies and templates of women's successful organizing with respect to informal economy issues and analysis of the potential for promoting gender equality and decent work through developing alliances.
- Analysis of the gendered dimensions of trade union organization and informal economy workers.
- The ILO needs more articulated positions in its research agenda about the organization and representation of specific marginalized informal economy workers such as domestic workers, commercial sex workers, and homeworkers, including ICT workers.

Finally, an overarching priority for ILO research on women, gender and the informal economy should be to ensure that work is done in such a way that it can be generated with, shared with, and used by diverse groups of low-income women to their advantage. To this end, the majority of ILO publications should become more "user-friendly". For example, book-length reports would benefit readers by incorporating brief "executive summaries" or concluding chapters comprising the main points of the work concerned, as well as pointers to key policy implications. This could be complemented by indices. The ILO might also consider switching bias, particularly with respect to Spanish language texts, from lengthy reviews to a balance of publications which comprises shorter more widely-circulable and accessible bulletins. Attention should also be paid to improving information sharing on



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best practices with respect to a range of informal economy issues across various regions. In addition to web discussions (and importantly from the point of view of grassroots women/organizations with limited access to the internet), the ILO could set up regular meetings between researchers, policy makers and programme implementers to identify best practices, and strategies to advance gender equality in informal work. Where possible, this should involve the participation of other agencies working on similar themes (e.g. CEPAL in Latin America, ESCAP in Asia and the Pacific), so as to avoid duplication of research, as well as to widen the basis for appraisal.<sup>5</sup>

Last, but not least, in order to promote greater inclusion, engagement with and representation of low-income women within ILO research and policy development, a mechanism could be set up by which women and other marginalized informal workers themselves could make suggestions as to research and action. With more input from these stakeholders, there may be greater prospects of improving women's access to labour markets, the range and quality of work they have undertaken within them, and their possibilities of working out of poverty.

<sup>5</sup> For example, activities of FORMUJER, a programme started in 1998 by three countries – Argentina, Bolivia and Costa Rica, whose objective is to develop measures and specific actions focused on disadvantaged women, are appraised as demonstrating potential and efficacy of regional programmes. Abramo (2006), Abramo (ed.) (2006), Silveira (2006), Silveira and Matosas (2003) discuss how the national experiences of implementation of the FORMUJER programmes have been shared, and produced a series of training instruments which can be used elsewhere. The information sharing component involved technical cooperation, training, a web page and reference courses. However, it would have also been useful to see more on particular instances of cooperation and information sharing, particularly in terms of how this led to specific actions in the constituent countries, and how they actually benefited the end-users (i.e. low income women).



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