



**The North-South Institute
L'Institut Nord-Sud**

**A Common Thread:
Issues for Women Workers in the
Garment Sector**

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for
**Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
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I. Executive Summary

This issues paper focuses on the garment industry, one of three sectors being addressed in WIEGO's global markets program, which seeks to explain how current changes in global production and distribution systems affect women. The paper will be followed by a number of research studies, designed to support the activities of the International Alliance of Home-Based Workers (HomeNet). HomeNet organizes both sub-contracted home-based workers and own account workers in the informal sector, and has requested WIEGO's assistance in analyzing present trends in the garment industry and in forging links with the government and private sectors to advocate for policy changes. The research findings will contribute to the policy dialogue and to finding ways to help women to challenge, to adjust to, or, to take advantage of the changes and opportunities resulting from the emerging trade and investment patterns.

In preparing the paper, the primary researcher consulted with a reference group of HomeNet representatives as well as the extensive literature. The goal of the paper was to identify: key issues in the garment sector; gaps in the current research on these issues; key actors including organizations, activists, researchers and policy makers; and, directions for future research, action, and policies.

The paper begins by discussing the concept of globalization and the current situation of garment workers. It then focuses on three broad thematic areas—the new trade agenda, changing production issues, and responses—within which are discussed a number of leading issues, key questions, research gaps and recommendations, and list key sources. It concludes with a bibliography.

Globalization and Women Workers

The globalization of the garment industry has led to significant changes in its structure. Once dominated by large manufacturers, who sold their products to retailers, it is now mainly controlled by a few large retailers who contract out the production of clothes under their own private labels. To be competitive, retailers have forced manufacturers to restructure: this has included slashing overhead and labour costs by contracting out work, either to homeworkers in the North or to factories and homeworkers in the South.

With increased liberalization, the market has become a leading factor in determining the location and price of production. The movement of apparel production to developing countries may encourage needed investment and jobs, but it has also increased competition for poorer countries to offer the cheapest workers and the most flexible (unregulated) conditions.

Women account for two-thirds of the global garment workforce—dominating employment in the industry in both developed and developing countries. Conditions tend to be poor—female workers in both North and South face long hours, low wages, unsafe workplaces, and sexual harassment—and associated with low unionization rates. In response, besides working with

traditional unions or new, union-like structures, women have organized more informally, through local cooperatives or international strategies and even through resistance activities.

Scope and Definitions

This paper focuses on ready-made (as opposed to tailor-made) garments, produced for both domestic consumption and export. It includes formal sector as well as informal sector work, as these are often integrally related; “informalization” can be seen as a deliberate strategy by the industry and governments to weaken workers’ rights in return for increased output and economic growth, respectively. On the other hand, the informal sector can be an important safety valve for women made redundant from the formal sector during a recession.

The extensive use of homeworkers in subcontracting chains shows the extremes to which decentralization and informalization has gone in the garment industry. While homeworkers are defined as lacking in autonomy, working for remuneration, in which the product is specified by the employer, they are often difficult to distinguish from independent, self-employed workers. Many may be counted as self-employed even though they are essentially disguised wage earners.

The literature underlines the deepening inter-relationship between industrial, formal sector work, and informal and household work. Because of the nature of garment work, many formal sector workers operate under the same constraints as informal workers -- they are invisible, subordinate and find it difficult to organize to improve their conditions.

Important for this study is the gender dimension – while some women have emerged from their experiences in the informal sector as micro-entrepreneurs, more generally women informal workers remain invisible, unprotected, and marginalized from state protection or political voice. A gender analysis identifies, analyses and helps to act upon inequalities that arise from the different roles of women and men or the unequal power relationships between them and the consequences of that inequality on their lives and well-being.

Themes

1. The New Trade Agenda

As many commentators have noted, trade policies and trade liberalization have differential impacts on the work and lives of women and men. The World Trade Organization’s (WTO) agreement on clothing, which should bring an end to quota restrictions in the year 2005, will affect employment in many countries. There have already been numerous changes associated with regional trading agreements, while the Asian crisis has affected workers dependent on clothing exports.

1.1 Trading Agreements. As new market opportunities arise from trade liberalization, whether women benefit (as workers or entrepreneurs) will depend on their relative labour costs, access to skills, technologies, credit, market information and proximity to markets. There is widespread concern that removing country quotas will lead to downward pressure on

working conditions in an attempt to maintain competition. Some argue that both developed and developing countries will benefit – as consumers and producers, respectively. But there may be losses amongst developing countries, although there is little agreement on which countries will gain and which will lose from the phasing out process. For instance, a country like Bangladesh is predicted to be a winner by some and a loser by others.

Besides these distributional questions, an important area for research is to determine what adjustment policies (e.g. training) might help to maintain employment, whilst also improving working conditions, and whether these would be allowed under other WTO rules. Another key issue is how women's concerns might be integrated into the trade rule-making process, and failing this, what governments and private firms might do to ensure that women and men gain equally from trade-related opportunities.

Areas for further research include:

- Bangladesh or Vietnam – as potential losers in the more open garments trade -- whether and what preparations manufacturers are making.
- Sri Lanka or Indonesia – as countries that might benefit – whether and what preparations are being made (e.g. more training).
- The effectiveness of technical help linking women producers to global markets.

1.2 Regionalization. Regional agreements, especially those involving developed and developing countries, as in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), can lead to increased specialization, or the relocation of the industry from one member country to another, and also divert trade from non-member countries. Cuts in labour costs, e.g. through a shift to homeworking, is one strategy used to maintain competitiveness. Preferential arrangements with other suppliers (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia and Eastern Europe for the European Union) are another strategy.

Areas for further research include:

- Organizational changes in the clothing industry of a country excluded from a trade agreement and the implications for women workers.
- Similarly, restructuring strategies in a “satellite country”, such as Morocco or the Dominican Republic, could be incorporated into another research area.

1.3 The Asian Crisis. In East Asia, union leaders were amongst the first to be laid-off in the garment industry. More use of subcontracting, coupled with growing unemployment has made organizing workers all the more difficult. There are important questions about employer responses to the crisis, and whether these vary by size or type of owner, as well as the gender impact of redundancies and worker responses, and implications for labour organizing activities. Some of these questions are already being addressed in another World Bank supported HomeNet/WIEGO study in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

2. *Changing Production Issues*

Globalization in the garment sector has been associated with major changes in production including subcontracting chains, technological innovation, location, ownership and product destination, as well as labour migration.

2.1 Subcontracting Chains. New international production and trade networks involving garments may be seen as examples of global commodity chains. There are ‘buyer-driven chains’ in which large retailers dominate, in contrast to ‘production-driven-chains’ dominated by manufacturers. The need for both to respond rapidly to changes in the volume and types of clothing demanded by consumers, coupled with new telecommunications technologies, has led to extensive use of subcontracting globally. Subcontracting provides a flexible and low-cost workforce. It is usually argued that this has accentuated the feminization of the global clothing workforce, and to a lowering of work conditions, though not all researchers agree.

This appears to be a particularly important topic for HomeNet, with several areas for further research, including:

- The types and characteristics of firms engaged in subcontracting in different countries, and the conditions of women workers in each.
- Strategies to coordinate research and action on subcontracting by academics, trade unionists and local authorities with homeworking groups.
- Factors influencing women’s choice of formal or informal work.

2.2 Technological Change. Technological change is a key element in the globalization and informalization of garment production. The way in which technology is being used is as interesting as its innate characteristics. New technologies have had more direct impact at the pre- and post-assembly stages, and led to increased pressures at the assembly stage. The actual sewing process has not changed radically; to the extent that new technologies are used in assembly, it is in the management of workers, especially in the formal sector. The emphasis on low inventories and just-in-time production has led to irregular employment patterns, which are often met through outsourcing to the informal sector with its flexible labour force.

Areas for further research include:

- Changes in technology that might assist countries to remain competitive as the MFA is phased out (e.g. allowing them to move into higher quality product niches), at the same time as helping to improve working conditions, in the informal as well as the formal sectors.
- Gender-differentiated impacts of different production and process technologies, whether in production for the domestic market or for export.
- The scope for using new technologies for organising and related international campaigns.

2.3 Location, Ownership and Destination. The location and ownership of firms as well as product destination are also important aspects in the restructuring of the garment industry. Besides labour cost differentials, other factors determining the relocation of production have included firm size, nationality of owner, market strategy (such as quality, niche) and market access. Working conditions can vary according to ownership and product destination (e.g.

domestic vs. export), itself often associated with differences in quality. Finally, export surpluses/seconds as well as imports can affect local producers.

Areas for further research include:

- Differences in ownership and the implications for working conditions and organizing strategies.
- Firms' experiences with improving product quality as a competitive strategy and the consequences for working conditions.
- A gender-impact analysis of competition from new and used clothing imports.

2.4 Migration. Migrant women, like homeworkers, have become part of the flexible labour force used to accommodate swings in the clothing market. Typically, migration has occurred from rural to urban areas, but increasingly workers move across borders to find employment in the garment industry. Though often legally engaged in factories or in informal units, in some cases migrant women work illegally in the informal sector, thereby increasing their vulnerability.

Areas for further research include:

- The impact of rural-urban migration on organizing garment workers.
- The relationship between international migration and working conditions in the garment industry both in countries of origin and destination.

3. Responses

To address the situation of garment workers internationally four areas for action have been suggested: trade mechanisms, legal strategies, international strategies, and strategies for organizing workers.

3.1 Trade Mechanisms. There are several proposals for addressing labour standards through international trade instruments. One is to introduce a social clause in the WTO; another is to include a labour side-agreement as per the NAFTA; a third is to link preferential tariffs to labour standards (as per the US Generalized System of Preferences). But many Southern groups as well as governments are concerned by these approaches.

Areas for further research include:

- The enforcement of labour standards attached to a social clause, or preferential tariffs, in an industry where such a lot of production is subcontracted or in homework.
- The possible interests of companies in working with the WTO to enforce a minimum set of labour standards.

3.2 Legal Strategies. Efforts to improve the situation of workers through legislation have been an important strategy. This may involve enforcement of existing laws; or changing the laws to ensure they adequately cover the informal sector and especially homeworkers, allow broad based bargaining, or require joint and several liability through the chain of production. The International Labour Organization (ILO) recently adopted a Convention under which ratifying countries are bound to “adopt, implement, and periodically review a national policy on home

work aimed at improving the situation for homeworkers” (ILO, 1996b). This national legislation would cover equal treatment of wage earners and homeworkers; written contracts; the responsibility of subcontractors; training; the rights to organize, to occupational health and safety, to minimum age requirements, to social security and to maternity protection. There are also guidelines for national data collection on homeworkers; the regulation of intermediaries; and provisions for inspection and enforcement.

Areas for further research include:

- The impact of globalization on governments’ capacity to raise labour standards in export-processing zones (EPZs) and other factories, as well as in the informal sector.
- Comparison of labour standards employed in different firms within the same country (e.g. Morocco).
- Organizing activities which have led to positive legal change and its enforcement.

3.3 International Strategies. With globalization of the garment industry, international strategies are both more possible and relevant as the workers in the North and South face many of the same problems. Transnational consumer campaigns have involved boycotts, protests, and leafleting at retail outlets to encourage companies to adopt and enforce codes of conduct and social labels, for the goods they sell, whether made in-house or outsourced. Such efforts have been criticized for several reasons such as the multiplicity of standards (although their total scope is usually quite limited), ineffective monitoring and implementation, and dilution of organizing efforts. On the other hand, they have highlighted the poor conditions of millions of garment workers today.

Areas for further research include:

- The scope for extending codes to homework in a way that working conditions are improved.
- Models for successful monitoring and enforcement, including precise and measurable standards, and the involvement of workers’ organizations.
- The implications of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade for social labelling.
- Information about labour standards in enterprises supplying a particular country in which there is a campaign to promote consumer awareness.

3.4 Organizing Strategies of Workers. Finally, there is the issue of organizing strategies. Traditionally, trade unionists have sought to abolish homework on the grounds that it is exploitative and in direct competition with unionized jobs. Nonetheless some trade unions and other groups have sought to organize homeworkers, to lobby and bargain on their behalf, and to provide them with a range of services. Joint international activities have included conferences on homeworking and exchanges about conditions and campaigning strategies. But alliances between homeworkers, unions and NGOs have proved difficult, raising questions of identity, representation, power and priorities.

Areas for further research include:

- Action-oriented research involving homeworkers, in Asia, Africa and Latin America/Caribbean, to collect information about working conditions and enhance worker’s ability to organize.

- Different forms of organizing in the formal and informal sectors which take into account the predominance of women workers in the industry.

II. Introduction

This study emerges from the increasing recognition of the links between the experiences of women workers in the North and the South, and the restructuring of the world economy. Women workers have been attempting to organize to improve their working conditions and understand some of the many issues that are and will be affecting them as a result of the new economic order. This paper represents the first step in the sub-sector project on the garment sector for WIEGO's global markets program.

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a network of grassroots membership organizations and researchers, statisticians, academics, and international development organizations. Sponsored jointly by three such organizations—the Self Employed Women's Organization of India (SEWA), Harvard University, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)—it seeks to supplement the work of grassroots organizations through research, policy, and program development on women in the informal sector.

WIEGO's global markets program seeks to trace changes in global production and distribution systems brought about by increased globalization. Changes in production systems have particular relevance for women employed in factories and for home-based workers involved in sub-contracting chains. Changes in distribution systems are especially relevant to micro-entrepreneurs who face increased competition in local/traditional markets and who usually lack the ways and means to link to emerging and increasingly global markets.

The research undertaken through the global markets program will largely support the International Alliance of Home-Based Workers (HomeNet). HomeNet organizes both sub-contracted home-based workers and own-account workers in the informal sector, and has requested WIEGO's assistance in analyzing economic trends and in forging links with government and the private sector to advocate for policy changes. The program will seek to assist HomeNet by undertaking research studies and initiating policy dialogues which lead to a better understanding of the impact of globalization on women workers in the informal sector. The program will also seek to find effective ways of helping women to link to new opportunities/emerging markets resulting from changes in trade and investment patterns.

In preparing the issues paper, the primary researcher consulted a reference group of HomeNet representatives who had the opportunity to provide feedback and make recommendations: their views are represented in the recommendations. The paper presents and analyzes key issues in the garment sector through a review of the literature and points to gaps in the current research in the sector. It identifies key actors in the sub-sector including organizations; practitioners; activists; researchers; and, policymakers. It also presents a bibliography of the literature, and, finally, it recommends directions for future research.

The paper begins by introducing the concept of globalization and the current situation of workers in the garment sector. The introduction is followed by an explanation of some of the key concepts and definitions and a review of the paper's scope. The paper is then divided into thematic sections that explore areas for future research. A bibliography, trade and employment statistics, and list of key contacts follow.

III. Women Workers and Globalization

The process of globalization involves the integration of national economies globally and an increase in exchange, not only of goods, but also of culture, ideas, and attitudes. This process has been facilitated by a number of changes, including the removal of trade barriers and the opening of local markets to foreign investment, improvements in telecommunications and other technologies (information, production processes, etc.) and the migration of workers.

Ward and Pyle (1995) suggest that there are three significant trends in global restructuring. First, a movement toward market-based, export-oriented strategies, mainly as a result of World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed structural adjustment policies (SAPs). Second, the rapid globalization of productive and marketing activities by transnational corporations from many countries has been accompanied by substantial informalization and subcontracting of work arrangements beyond state regulation (sometimes called “flexibilization”). And third, various economic crises have occurred, involving periodic recessions, debt, and unemployment (Ward and Pyle, 1995). The evolution of new employment possibilities for women, whether formal factory work or informal subcontracted and home work, have been significantly affected by these developments (Joeke, 1995; Joeke and Weston, 1994). Globalization also allows a new space for organizing activities which cross international borders.

Women are critically affected by a number of developments tied to the globalization of economic activity. In fact, they are at the center of several phenomenon which can be linked to economic globalization, such as export processing zones (EPZs), enforced flexibility of labour, outsourcing, home-based employment, and international migration flows. As a result, women are forming a more integral part of the global economic fabric. The Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing 1995, recognized that, in many regions, women’s participation in remunerated work had increased in both the formal and the informal labour market (United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995). Women form the bulk of the cheap and flexible labour force which is sought on the global labour market (David, 1998). The International Labour Organization (ILO) now speaks of the “feminization of the labour force and of employment at the world level” (ILO, 1995d).

The consequences of increased globalization for workers are varied. With increased liberalization the market becomes the most important factor in determining the location and price of production. The movement of apparel production to developing countries may encourage needed investment and jobs in those countries, but it will also increase the competition for poorer countries to offer the cheapest workers and the most flexible (unregulated) conditions (Women Working Worldwide, 1997b).

The globalization of the garment industry has led to significant changes in its structure. While it was once dominated by large manufacturers which sold their products to retailers, the industry is now mainly controlled by a few large retailers who contract out the production of clothes under their own private labels. To be competitive, retailers have forced manufacturers to restructure: this has included slashing overhead and labour costs by contracting out work, either to

homeworkers in the North or to factories in the South. The concentration of power in the industry allows these retailers to dictate prices and turn-around time for garment production. Needed is a cheap, flexible labour force which can quickly respond to the retailers' demands (Bangham and Olson, 1997).

As a source of low-wage labour, women have contributed significantly to the comparative advantage developing countries enjoy in the labour-intensive garment industry. "More than two-thirds of the global labour force in the clothing industry is accounted for by women and the industry accounts for almost one-fifth of the total world female labour force in manufacturing" (UNIDO cited in Joekes, 1995:1). In Bangladesh, for example, women represent an estimated 65 to 85 percent of the approximately 1.2 million workers in the garment industry (Pendarvis Harris et al, 1997:7). This concentration of women workers in the clothing sector is found in developed countries as well as in developing countries. Thus, labour practices within the garment industry need to be viewed in the context of women's rising participation rates.

Female workers in both North and South face long hours, low wages, unsafe workplaces, and sexual harassment (see, for example, Bains, 1998; Bell, 1997; *Women Working Worldwide*, 1997b). One factor that may contribute to the problems is the low rate of unionization of female garment workers, globally. In Bangladesh, a 1996 study of trade unions and the garment industry reports that, although the export-oriented garment sector has grown tremendously in the last two decades, this has not been accompanied by a significant rise in trade unionism (Khan, 1997). This is attributed to the restructuring of the industry in response to global competition. The problem also exists in industrialized countries where rates of unionization have also declined significantly since 1980 (see, for example, Yanz et al, 1999: 13).

The structures in which women workers may seek resolution to their problems vary as much as their work. Responding to their situations has included—and could include—a number of strategies, most of which usually involve some form of organizing on local, national, and international levels. The organizing strategies women have employed include working with traditional unions; developing new union-like structures; organizing more informally; and forming cooperatives, international strategies, and even resistance activities. Women need to examine the myriad ways available to them to improve their poor conditions resulting from globalization.

IV. Scope and Definitions

Because of the vast literature available, the scope of the study needed to be limited. Among the issues dealt with were: whether to limit ourselves to the informal sector; which products to include; whether to limit ourselves to products produced for international markets or also include those produced for domestic consumption; and, how to incorporate gender as a methodological tool.

WIEGO's work is focused on women in the informal sector. Efforts to better understand the informal sector have led to a number of studies which: attempt to define the informal sector (ILO, 1991a; Mead and Morrison, 1996; Portes, 1994); distinguish it from the formal sector (Patel and Srivastava, 1996; Sassen, 1998); and theorize about its importance to national development (Rakowski, 1994). The ILO first used the term "informal sector" in 1972. At that time the term described the existence of large numbers of "working poor," many of whom were producing goods and services, but whose activities were not formally recognized, recorded, protected, or regulated (ILO, 1991a). Other conceptualizations of the term include informal activities as survival strategies, as petty commodity production, and as micro-entrepreneurship (Rakowski, 1994). As Mead and Morrison remark, the Third World has a great many enterprises which are characteristic of the informal sector, because they have "a small number of workers, a limited extent to which the enterprise abides by the laws and regulations of the country, and a low level of capitalization" (1996:1617).

"Understanding women's experiences as wives, mothers and household heads is crucial to understanding their particular experiences with manufacturing."
(Lawson, 1995: 441)

One of the most compelling means of defining the informal sector has been by linking it to labour standards. Conceptualized mainly by Alejandro Portes (1994) as well as many authors from the ILO, this view seeks to make the link between informality and impoverishment of workers. It is argued that workers in the informal sector tend to share characteristics subsumed under the heading of "downgraded labour"—they receive fewer benefits, lower wages, and have poorer working conditions (Rakowski, 1994). For some, the lack of labour standards not only defines the informal sector, but explains it. In this view, the process of "informalization" can be seen as an international move on the part of the governments to "weaken the rights of workers and unions...with the acquiescence of the state in the interest of renewed economic growth" (Rakowski, 1994:504).

There are also many who argue that the term is too problematic to be used in many contexts. For instance, Mead and Morrison (1996) suggest that the informal sector means very different things to different people and that, therefore, the term should not be used, particularly in cross-country comparisons or analyses. Similarly, Beneria and Roldan (1987) suggest that the emphasis should not be on formal/informal, but rather should emphasize the difference between legal/illegal or formal/underground.

A major issue in formal and informal sector research, particularly for this study, is the importance of gender difference in explanations. Although some women, as emerging micro-

entrepreneurs, have benefited from their experiences in the informal sector (Lawson, 1995; Prugl and Tinker, 1997), the process of subcontracting taps into and reinforces the gender division of labour in which women informal workers remain invisible, unprotected, and marginalized from state protection or political voice (Beechey, 1988; Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Scott, 1983; Ward and Pyle, 1995).

In many countries, informal sector workers consist mostly of women workers who experience permeable and overlapping boundaries between their formal and informal work and their household work as well. Women's involvement in the informal sector has increased as they are faced with economic recession which leads to reduced job opportunities in the formal sector as well as increased need for additional family income (CCIC, 1998; UNIDO, 1994).

The logical extreme of globalization's tendency toward decentralization and informalization is the use of homeworkers in subcontracting chains. The ILO defines a homeworker as someone who works in his or her home or in other premises he or she has chosen for remuneration. The work being done must also result in a product or service specified by the employer, whether the equipment, materials, or other inputs used are provided by this person, the employer, or the intermediary, as long as this person does not have the degree of autonomy and does not fulfil other conditions necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations, or court decisions (ILO, 1997b). In many cases it is difficult to distinguish clearly between homeworkers and independent, self-employed workers. Many of those working at home may be counted as self-employed even though they are essentially disguised wage earners (ILO, 1995b).

The Council of Europe definition also brings in the concept of "subordination," on the understanding that this does not involve direct control but more indirect methods of supervision. "A homeworker or outworker is a person performing manual or intellectual work at a stable place and in a situation of subordination to, but outside the control of, the employer" (quoted in Tate, 1995).

The ILO believes that homeworking is on the rise internationally (ILO, 1995b). In both developing and industrialized countries, women account for the great majority of homeworkers. In industrial homework, men often take on the role of subcontractors or intermediaries, or carry out ancillary tasks such as collecting and delivering materials and finished work. They seldom work at home themselves or assist women.

Because the overall WIEGO program is focused on the informal sector, and particularly in light of HomeNet's mandate, we had originally assumed that the formal sector would not be included in this study other than as a basis of comparison. Rather, we assumed that we would only examine informal sector workers and homeworkers. However, the existing literature clearly shows the problem with such an approach by increasingly demonstrating the relationship between industrial, formal sector work, and informal and household work (Beechey, 1988; Beneria and Roldan, 1987; ILO, 1995b; Mies, 1982; Scott, 1983; Tate, 1995; Ward and Pyle, 1995).

The relationships between these different forms of work are especially unique to women: as such, the linkages between the formal sector, the informal sector, and housework are important categories of analysis. Further, the main purpose of the study is to improve the ability of marginalized and unprotected women workers to organize to better their conditions. Because of the nature of garment work, many formal sector workers in this sector operate under the same constraints as informal sector workers: they are invisible, subordinate, and find it difficult to organize to improve their conditions. As such, the literature reviewed here includes formal, informal, and household work.

We also attempted to limit the products that we would include in the sub-sector study. In particular, we have not accorded any attention to the production of textiles or handicrafts. Rather, the study focuses on ready-made garments. The study also looks at these products in the context of production for the export market. However, in order to assess some of the interesting questions that emerge from an examination of the relationship between domestic and international production and consumption, we have included a thematic area that covers issues of product destination.

As an organizing theme the paper looks at the intersection between gender, globalization, and organizing. In particular, wherever possible the issues are examined using a gender analysis. A gender analysis identifies, analyzes, and helps to act upon inequalities that arise from the different roles of women and men or from the unequal power relationships between them and the consequences of that inequality on their lives and well-being. Since these inequalities most often disadvantage women, a gender analysis highlights women's problems. However, it also reveals specific problems that men face as a result of the social construction of male roles. The importance of using a gender analysis is particularly apparent when looking at the informal sector where women's multiple roles have a significant impact on the meaning and organization of their work.

V. Themes

A number of thematic areas have emerged in this study as critical to understanding the garment sector in the context of gender and globalization. Although many of the areas overlap, we have organized our survey along those themes to enable us to most clearly narrow down the options for future research. Each thematic area includes a general discussion based on the research, poses key questions, outlines research gaps and recommendations for future work, and provides the key literature sources. A preliminary list of key contacts are included in Annex 2.

1. The New Trade Agenda

As many commentators have noted, trade policies are not gender neutral and trade liberalization has differential impacts on the work and lives of women and men (Beneria and Lind, 1994; Heyzer, 1997; Joekes and Weston 1994; Williams and Forde, 1998). As Williams and Forde point out:

The emphasis on export promotion will have profound effects on women workers in the formal, informal and household sectors of national economies, as well as on women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises. Some of these effects will be positive, while some will be negative (1998:10).

As new market opportunities arise from trade liberalization, some women entrepreneurs who are well placed to take advantage of these changes will gain while others will be unable to compete for a variety of reasons, including lack of access to skills, technologies, credit, and market information.

As employment shifts to countries with greater comparative advantage, some women will gain employment and others will lose their jobs (Heyzer, 1997). Liberalizing trade by allowing greater unimpeded passage of goods between countries has led to particular concerns that the new agreements administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO) will negatively affect working conditions. This deregulation of trade often leads to the increased flexibilization of labour. As such, many will see their employment patterns and conditions of work change, including a downward pressure on pay, growing insecurity of employment, and poor working conditions (Hale, 1996; LeQuesne, 1996).

In this section, a number of themes are explored which relate to the changing nature of trade. The first issue relates to questions of how specific trading agreements impact on the garment sector. The second looks at the impact of regional trading blocs on both the member countries and those outside these agreements. Finally, we look at the impact of the Asian financial crisis on women workers in the sector.

1.1 Trade Agreements and the Garment Sector

Discussion

Particular changes in international trade will affect workers in the garment sector. During the last 20 years, international trade in textiles and clothing between developed and developing countries has been regulated by the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA). The MFA arose in 1974 out of pressure on many developed countries to protect their domestic clothing and textile industries from large quantities of exports from developing countries.¹ The MFA is not one agreement, but consists of a whole series of bilateral agreements that were negotiated country-by-country, to set quotas on the importation of textiles and clothing from developing to developed countries.

The MFA was designed not only for the benefit of developed countries, but also to give exporting countries orderly access to developed-country markets. (Econolynx International, 1992). Originally intended to provide “temporary” protection for domestic producers in developed countries while progressively reducing trade barriers and liberalizing world trade in textiles and clothing products, the MFA actually became one of the most restrictive sets of trade rules. It has been extended four times since its implementation. Although negotiated under the auspices of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the MFA—an agreement to lower trade barriers—seriously deviated from its principles (Consumer Products Industries Branch, 1998). As a result, during the Uruguay Round, developing countries fought for the end of the MFA and the full integration of the clothing and textile sector into the GATT.

The Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, held from 1986 to 1994 under the GATT, concluded with a new agreement which included the following changes:

- the WTO would replace the GATT as of January 1, 1995. The WTO is the legal and institutional foundation administering and implementing multilateral trade agreements. It also functions as a forum for multilateral trade negotiations, resolves trade disputes, oversees national trade policies, and cooperates with other international institutions in global economic policymaking.
- the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), under the direction of the WTO, consisted of a phased increase in existing quotas and integration of clothing and textile products into normal trading rules, to be completed by 2005. The ATC is a transitional arrangement intended to facilitate the phasing out of MFA quotas by the year 2005 when the textile and clothing sector will fall under normal international trading rules. The inclusion of the ATC in the WTO was regarded as one of the developing countries’ major achievements in the Uruguay Round (Cai, 1997).

¹ Developing countries enjoy a comparative advantage in the clothing and textile sector due to their intensive use of unskilled labour and relatively low wages. In 1992, textiles and clothing accounted for approximately 26 percent of developing countries’ total exports. In 1996 the developing countries’ share in world textile exports was 59 percent; their share of clothing exports was 73 percent.

The ATC has two principal elements. First is the progressive integration of textile and clothing products into the GATT 1994.² This product integration will take place in four stages: the first, which came into effect on January 1, 1995, integrated 16 percent of products. Every three years since will see the integration of 17 percent, 18 percent, and finally, on January 1, 2005, the remaining 49 percent. These integration rates are the minimum obligation and members are free to complete integration at an earlier date or to integrate products faster. The second element is the phasing-out of previous MFA quota restrictions by expanding the quotas until they no longer limit imports. Quota expansion will also take place in four stages, with all quotas removed by January 1, 2005.

Many economists believe that both developed and developing countries will benefit from increased liberalization and the phasing out of the MFA (Anderson, 1996; Majmudar, 1996; Murray, 1995; Trela and Whalley, 1990b; Yang, 1994). Although there are concerns in developed countries about the negative impact increased imports from developing countries will have on domestic industries, including on working conditions, these countries will reap significant benefits from the ATC. In particular, it is argued that they will be able to source imports more efficiently, rationalize their own production, and consume more of what they prefer at lower prices (Anderson, 1996:78).

The impact on developing countries is less clear. Most commentators believe that even though the MFA benefited some countries more than others, the phasing out of the MFA will benefit developing countries as a whole (Majmudar, 1996; Murray, 1995; Trela and Whalley, 1990b; Yang, 1994). Countries and regions that stand to gain the most are likely those with lower labour and production costs; better input supplies and infrastructure; and which are closer to markets. However, the phasing out could disadvantage those countries which have gained a market share as a result of quotas (Women Working Worldwide, 1997b). There appears to be little agreement, however, on which countries will gain and which will lose from the phasing out process.

The impact of the ATC on Bangladesh is far from clear, for example. Some analysts believe that Bangladesh will gain from the liberalization of the textile and clothing trade. Majmudar (1996) argues that Bangladesh's low labour costs are enough to ensure that it will gain from the ATC. Further, GATT economists predict

...a 60 percent increase in trade in clothing with the phasing-out of the MFA. Most of that gain will accrue to relative newcomer countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, China and India, which would sooner rather than later have hit restraints under the MFA, where they had not already done so (Atkinson cited in Joekes, 1996:10).

Other analysts are not as optimistic, however, believing that the least developed countries—including Bangladesh—stand to lose. For example, Page and Davenport (1994) argue that Bangladesh can expect to lose 18.9 percent of its exports (from 1992 levels) (Page and Davenport cited in Weston, 1996:86). The principal reason for this potential loss is the enormous

² Although the WTO has replaced the GATT, integration of products into normal international trading rules is still being referred to as "integration into the revised GATT," known as GATT 1994.

amount of competition Bangladesh will face from other low-cost garment-exporting countries which will also experience an increase in their quotas, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea (Econolynx International, 1992). The potential for more competitive exporters to experience larger increases in exports at the expense of the less competitive exporters among the developing countries would favour developing countries in Asia over those in Africa and Latin America. This raises the question of the economic development prospects of the poorer among the developing countries. If they can not competitively export textiles and clothing, the most labour-intensive products, what can they expect to export and how can the international community best assist them? (Murray, 1995).

Another concern stems from the phasing-out process which is “backloaded” since almost half of product integration (49 percent) will not occur until the last stage of the 10-year transition period. Much of the integration so far has been on products for which no restrictions previously existed. This allows major importing countries to delay the integration process, which in turn makes it difficult to measure the impacts of the elimination of the MFA on their economies (Anderson, 1996; Lal Das, 1997; Majmudar, 1996). More important, this delay means that there will be less political will to continue the process in the later stages since those politicians who negotiated the agreement will no longer be in office (Murray, 1995). Many are predicting that developed countries will renege on the Uruguay Round agreements around textiles and clothing by putting up unnecessary restraints such as anti-dumping actions against developing-country exporters (Anderson, 1996; Lal Das, 1997; Murray, 1995; Smeets, 1995).

Key Questions

- What are the differential impacts of the phasing out of the MFA? Among Southern countries? Within a Southern country—between domestic/export manufacturers and between manufacturers/workers? On the North? In other words, who will benefit, who will lose, and why?
- Will ending the quota system lead to more capital-intensive production processes in some countries?
- Will the shifts in international trade resulting from globalization and the WTO have a gendered impact?
- Do these changes in international trade create new opportunities for women by allowing them to have better access to markets?
- Does the WTO preclude certain kinds of adjustment strategies? What would need to be done to ensure that policies to improve working conditions do not contravene existing and new trade agreements?
- What are the implications of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) for this sector?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

An examination of the literature on trade and the garment sector allowed a number of gaps in the research to be identified. Women have not been very active in advocating for changes to the trade agenda because trade policymaking is very complex. There is therefore a need for research on the different ways that women’s concerns can be integrated into the trading process, including the

WTO, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), etc.

A working group formed during the 1996 Ministerial meeting on the WTO stated that WTO policies must be examined in the context of broader macro-, meso-, and micro-level policies, including SAPs, the Special Program for Africa, and the external debt burden of developing countries.

Other needs identified in the literature include:

- data on women's economic activities;
- an analysis of the gendered impact of proposed trade agreements at the regional or international level;
- information on how to ensure that existing research becomes more accessible to women;
- a study of the institutional framework for and process of trade policymaking;
- measures to minimize the threats and maximize opportunities of new trade agreements; and
- research on what governments and the private sector can do to ensure that women and men gain equally from economic opportunities arising from trade liberalization.

For the purposes of the WIEGO study, the distortions in the sector are so great that attempting to predict the impact of the MFA on particular countries is not likely to be the most useful strategy. There is a fairly healthy body of literature that attempts to predict the impact on various countries and regions (See, for example, Moore, 1997). However, it is important to understand the various ways in which the industry in individual countries may cope with the changes in international trading patterns. Some countries will continue to have a comparative labour cost advantage, for instance, while others will compete on quality and will therefore need to improve their human resources, backward linkages, or will move into different parts of the production process such as designing.

In order to determine how best to organize activities to improve the status of women workers, it is important to understand which process takes place in each country. If labour costs are likely to be the only way in which an industry can compete, there is then a need for increased understanding of labour conditions, of the chains of production, and of the composition and organization of the informal sector. If there is a greater move toward human resource development, however, women may benefit more from research on how to improve their skills and on how to link them to the markets and ensure that overall standards are maintained.

We recommend that a research project on issues surrounding trade agreements would most usefully focus on either Bangladesh or Vietnam, two countries which are thought to be potential losers in the move to more open trade in garments. Examining whether and how manufacturers are preparing for changes may be particularly relevant to workers. Preliminary data in Bangladesh (Delahanty, 1996) indicates that owners are not changing their production processes or human resource management policies, a situation which could have extremely serious effects on workers.

Alternatively, countries with a more developed industry, such as Sri Lanka, are expected to benefit from greater inputs into human resources, etc. A study looking at the ways in which women may be able to take advantage of these changes would also be revealing. Comparative studies in countries such as Indonesia which demonstrate the ways in which women have already benefited from changes in production processes could also be undertaken.

Two other projects bear further evaluation.

- First: An international trade fair held in Delhi in 1997 aimed to forge links between women entrepreneurs and overseas markets, and increase their exposure to new technologies and new ideas. To draw out lessons for other areas, it would be useful to determine whether this trade fair had the desired impact. Was sufficient research carried out to determine how women would use this information? Are there better ways to help women gain access?
- Second: The organization ENGENDER is carrying out a project to help community producers get their produce to international markets. How is this working? Can this project be expanded to other regions, and how?

Key Sources

Anderson, 1996; Beneria and Lind, 1994; Brugnoli and Resmini, 1996; Cai, 1997; Consumer Products Industry Branch, 1998; Delahanty, 1996; Econlynx International, 1992; Gender and Development, 1996; Hale, 1996; Hamilton, 1990; Heyzer, 1997; ILO, 1995d; Joeques, 1995; Joeques and Weston, 1994; Lal Das, 1997; LeQuesne, 1996; Majmudar, 1996; Marton, 1995; Moore, 1995; Moore, 1997; Murray, 1995; Navretti, 1996; Page and Davenport, 1994; Park, 1994; Romero, 1995; Smeets, 1995; Trela and Whalley, 1990b; Weston, 1996; Weston, 1997; Williams and Forde, 1998; Women Working Worldwide, 1997b; Yang, 1994.

1.2. Regionalization

Discussion

There are two main issues to consider when thinking about regionalization. The first is to determine the effects within the countries that are parties to a regional trade agreement; the second is what happens to countries which are outside such agreements.

As in any discussion of the impacts of trade, the range of variables is so great that it is often difficult to determine cause and effect. Further, each country or region may be affected differently. Certainly, the general literature on international trade does not look much at the impact on employment and labour effects of intra-regional trade. The exception to a certain extent has been the literature on trade agreements which have a North-South dimension, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), although even here, the results are ambiguous and specific to individual countries (Cortes et al, 1997).

The NAFTA, for example, has led to job losses and a lowering of working standards in the clothing sector in Canada and the US. The ILO reports that employment, which was relatively stable until 1989, fell sharply with the impending signature of the NAFTA (ILO, 1995d). The national labour force survey in Mexico showed that the unemployment rate remained more or less constant before and after NAFTA but that the percentage of workers without any form of worker benefits/labour protection increased after NAFTA.

Wage differences in Canada and the US have leveled off, whereas the difference between the two countries and Mexico remains large. In particular, the threat of manufacturers moving more production to Mexico is believed to have forced unions to compromise on labour standards and has led to increases in informal and home work (Vosko, 1993). Further, NAFTA has had regional effects within member countries. For example, the industry in Quebec has suffered far more than in other parts of Canada. When looking at regional effects within particular countries, it is important to consider gender issues. A study in Ireland indicates how understanding gender relations can explain regional differences in the development of the clothing industry (Gray, 1993).

Countries outside regional trading blocs can suffer a number of economic effects, including trade diversion, investment diversion, terms-of-trade effects, and trade creation (Kelegama, 1997). There can, in other words, once again be winners and losers. Because of NAFTA, for example, other countries in Latin America which have the same labour costs are penalized compared to Mexico because they do not have the same access to North American markets (ILO, 1995d). However, there may be other mediating factors; for example, Kelegama (1997) has shown that increased intra-regional economic activity may lead to increased demand for imports from third countries.

Because of the need for quick responses to changing demands, proximity to a target market or a free trade area has become increasingly important (ILO, 1995d). Both the European Union (EU) and the US may continue to favour certain groups of countries which retain market shares (for

example, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Dominican Republic for the US and Morocco, Tunisia, and Eastern Europe for the EU (Majmudar, 1996).

Key Questions

- How do regional trading blocs facilitate or harm the clothing sector?
- What will the impact of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), NAFTA, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) be on industries? What opportunities arise?
- How do regional trading blocs facilitate or hinder labour organizing?
- What are the particular conditions of “satellite countries” (e.g. the Dominican Republic to the US; Morocco to the EU) and their workers? Are they better or worse off? Are there unique opportunities for addressing labour standards that are unavailable in other countries?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

Although some research has been carried out on most of the key questions identified above, this is certainly an understudied area. And while the questions around regionalization do not appear to interest HomeNet members greatly, we have two suggestions:

1. A study that examines the impact of a trading agreement on a non-member country could suggest how the industry was having to shift its organizational capacity to compete with member countries. This could offer new opportunities for women workers in the country.
2. It would also be useful to examine changes in the industry which are occurring in a “satellite country” such as Morocco or the Dominican Republic, as part of another research area.

Key Sources

Anderson, 1996; Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Balkwell and Dickerson, 1994; CLC, 1997a; Cortes et al, 1997; Gray, 1993; ILO, 1995d; Kelegama, 1997; Majmudar, 1996; Navretti, 1996; Vosko, 1993; Weeks, 1998.

1.3. The Asian Crisis

Discussion

A number of theories have been put forth to explain the causes of the Asian economic collapse. Some consensus has emerged, however, that policies promoting the globalization of markets, particularly export-led growth and financial markets, precipitated the Asian crisis (CCIC, 1998; Culpeper, 1998). This model, which was encouraged by international investors, prioritized open trade, leading countries in South East Asia to be overly dependent on external factors, particularly export sales and external finance.

Massive lay-offs in the manufacturing and financial sectors have led to widespread poverty. Women workers may be disproportionately affected for a number of reasons: a) they dominate the workforce in those industries most affected by the economic situation—textiles, garments, and footwear; b) they are more likely to be laid off than their male counterparts (CCIC, 1998; World Bank, 1998); c) more women are employed informally, through subcontracting chains and are therefore easier to make redundant; and, d) migrant workers who are most likely to be let off first greatly outnumber their male counterparts (Southeast Asian HomeNet, 1998). Further, the crisis is likely to increase the number of women working in the informal sector as high underemployment and unemployment rates continue to rise.

Workers' organizations have made some progress in advancing workers' rights in the region in recent years, but the crisis threatens these advances. For example, women in the Par Garment factory in Thailand, producing for the GAP, FILL, and Adidas, have stated that union leaders were the first to be laid-off (CCIC, 1998). There is also evidence that the crisis is leading to greater subcontracting in the garment industry. This, plus the growth in unemployment or underemployment, has made organizing workers all the more difficult.

Key Questions

- What are the gender issues in worker redundancy and increased rates of informal sector activity in the garment sector?
- What has been the impact on garment production in the region? Has it varied according to the type of ownership?
- How are women who became unemployed due to garment factory closings coping? If they are moving into informal sector work, is it in garments or other types of activities?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

Because the Asian financial crisis is recent, there are many gaps in our understanding of the issues. Research activities undertaken in the region are now attempting to determine responses to the crisis. In particular, the WIEGO global markets program includes HomeNet/WIEGO study supported by the World Bank on the employment aspects of the Asian crisis in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Although additional studies of the impact on labour organizing activities in the region would be interesting, HomeNet feels the existing study may be adequate, provided there is an exchange of information with researchers involved in the clothing project.

Key Sources

CCIC, 1998; Culpeper, 1998; IGC, 1998; ILO, 1997d; Southeast Asia Homenet, 1998; World Bank, 1998.

2. Changing Production Issues

Globalization has brought about several changes in garment production. This section examines the following thematic areas: the nature of subcontracting chains; the impact of technological innovation; the significance of the location and ownership of production, as well as product destination; and the impact on workers' migration.

2.1 Subcontracting Chains: The New Way of Doing Business

Discussion

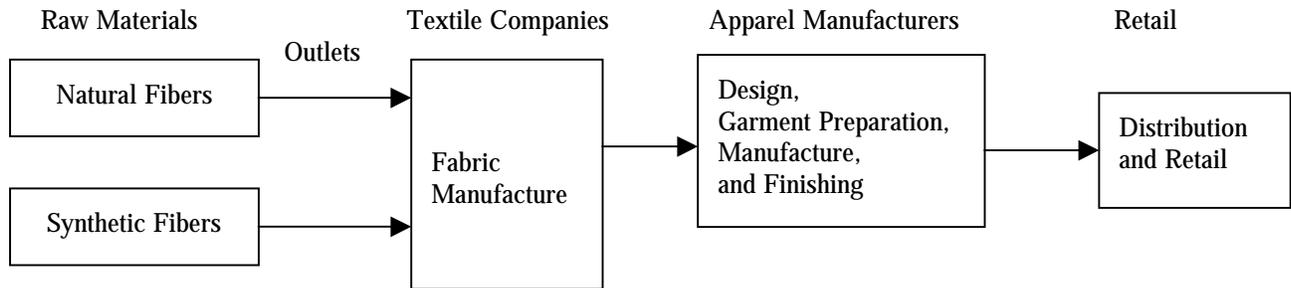
As a result of globalization, the manufacture and production of a whole array of goods has been dispersed globally to both industrialized and developing countries (Gereffi, 1994). This dispersal has allowed both manufacturers and retailers to establish new international production and trade networks.

The analytical understanding of global commodity chains provides a framework for understanding the activities of international organizations and their production relationships within the garment sector. The global commodity chain is roughly defined as the sets of organizational networks which are clustered around one commodity or product, linking firms, households, and communities to one another and the world community (Gereffi et al, 1994; Palpacuer and Parisotto, 1998).

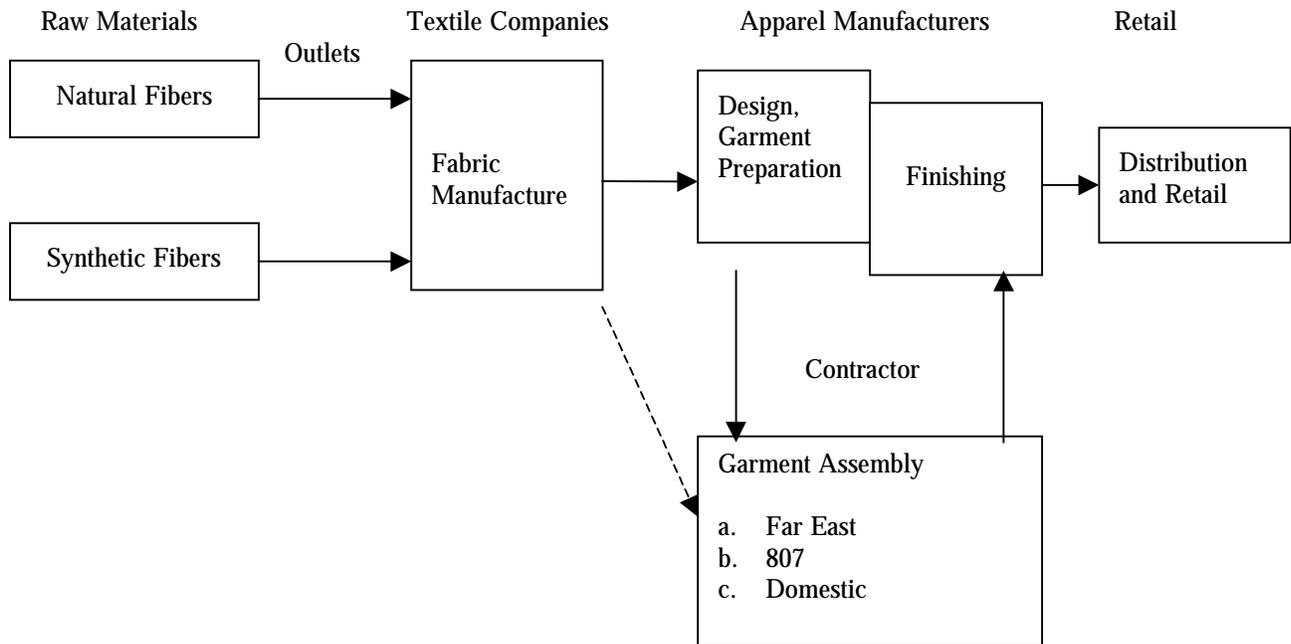
The expansion of global production networks in the garment industry over the past two decades is associated with aggressive marketing strategies by large retailers to promote strong brand recognition. Thus, the garment industry has evolved to be mainly organized around the market-driven needs of large retailers, referred to by Gereffi (1994) as "buyer-driven chains." Buyer chains are formed by large retailers or branded marketers that arrange for the manufacture of their products through global sourcing linkages (Gereffi, 1994; Palpacuer and Parisotto, 1998). Profits in this kind of chain do not come from economies of scale and technological advances as much as from a "unique combination of high-value research, design, sales, marketing and financial services" (Gereffi, 1994:99). However, not all garment production is done for retailers. Much of it remains mass produced by the manufacturers, referred to as production chains. The figure below presents a schematic breakdown of these two different types of chains.

Apparel Commodity Chains

a. Standardized, Mass-Production Chain



b. Fashion-Oriented Chain



Source: Taplin, 1994.

The garment industry is thus becoming more “vertically disintegrated” or “deverticalized” (Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Dangler 1994; Van Heerden, 1998) as major retailers and brands concentrate only on design, marketing, and subcontract manufacturing activities. As a result, multinational firms subcontract to local firms which subcontract to middlemen, which further subcontract to petty commodity producers and homeworkers (Dangler, 1994).

Subcontracting has been, in part, a response to changes in the organization of production, through a combination of lower labour costs, increased flexibility, and minimized investment risks (Dangler, 1994). This option is mainly used to cut production costs through reduced fixed labour costs as a result of a shift from direct to indirect forms of employment. (Beneria, 1987; Dangler, 1994; Palpacuer, 1997; Park 1994; UNIDO, 1994). Associated with this notion is the suggestion that it is a way of circumventing unions and labour organizing.

Subcontracting can be a method of transferring labour demands from high wage organized segments of the labour market to low wage disorganized segments of the labour market (Scott, 1983:244).

Whatever the reason, this flexibilization of labour tends to put downward pressure on wages, while reducing employment security and increasing substandard or hazardous working conditions (Hale, 1996). As well, many commentators argue that one of the main features of this flexibilization has been a process of global feminization of the manufacturing workforce (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996; ILO, 1994a; Standing, 1989a). Women's share of industrial employment has increased and women have replaced men under conditions of deregulated employment (Pearson, 1998). Elson (1996), however, notes that flexibilization is not always associated with feminization and that flexibility is not inevitably detrimental to workers. It is important to understand these interactions further.

Subcontracting has led to different forms of organizing production. If technological developments in the industry permit decentralization of the production process, the incidence of subcontracting is likely to be high. One of the usual features of this increased need for flexibilization in the workforce has been an increase in the use of informal sector workers in the industry.

Key Questions

- How can groups organize in the context of subcontracting chains?
- How does subcontracting affect employment relations and labour standards?
- What information is needed to allow such organizing activity to take place? How should this information be gathered, by whom, etc.?
- What production system would best ensure transparency? Are any such systems likely?
- What are the economics of chains of subcontracting? How do they work? Are there ways of determining who is doing what in this sector and can we measure the cost and benefits?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

The HomeNet reference group strongly felt that subcontracting chains and their structure were important areas for further study. The links between homeworkers and between homeworkers and employers, as well as to possible support groups, are often tenuous or virtually non-existent: the employer's knowledge, for example, is often limited to the intermediary who collects and pays for the finished product. Homeworkers need to be made visible as workers in the production

chains. Research carried out through this project would be instrumental in uncovering these ties and establishing the chain of production around which action can be taken.

Two studies on subcontracting chains in the garment sector are illustrative. The first, carried out in Europe by HomeNet, dealt with subcontracting chains which started at the homeworkers and worked their way up. The other study by the group SOMO in the Netherlands traced the production chains of a particular company, C&A (Smit, 1989; Tate, 1995). Both are useful methodologically although the HomeNet study was constrained by its inability to study chains internationally.

Because production links in the commodity chain vary from country to country, countries are not always the most appropriate unit of analysis when dealing with globalized apparel production. As such, the WIEGO study should enable researchers to follow chains cross-nationally. Before embarking on such a study, however, it would be appropriate to ensure that the research is action-oriented: tracing subcontracting chains without an action strategy appears to be of limited value. It would also be useful to examine other studies which traced subcontracting chains to determine which strategy worked and how the information was used. In addition, there is a large body of research on the ways in which international subcontracting chains function which should be reviewed before undertaking field work (see for example, Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994).

Very little data exists on homeworkers at the macro level: as a result very little can be said about the impact of “homework” on national economies. However, certain indicators show that homeworking has recently contributed significantly to export earnings in several countries. In the Philippines, for example, there has been a significant upsurge in the production and export of garments, handicrafts, and footwear. Most of these industries are known to depend heavily on outworking. Further work could be done in this area to make the work of homeworkers more visible in national accounting systems.

Other research gaps indicated in the literature include:

- an examination of the social and institutional context of Global Commodity Chains (see Palpacuer and Parisotto, 1998);
- how gender interacts with race and class in the subcontracting chains. It has been shown, for example, that subcontracting chains in the UK have led to a trend whereby minority men become part of the entrepreneurial class, while minority women become further entrenched in the labour pool (Phizacklea, 1990);
- an examination of the types of firms which are engaged in subcontracting and their characteristics. For example, studies have shown that the larger the firm, the more likely it is to subcontract (see Standing, 1989b);
- an assessment of strategies for coordinating research carried out by academic institutions, trade union research units, and local authorities in order to obtain a more complete picture, and establish links with homeworking groups or trade unions with homeworker members. It is particularly important to survey employers to better understand the role that homework plays in the organization of production. (Tate, 1995);
- longitudinal and cross-national studies at the firm and industry levels to examine women’s employment histories, their wage trends, differences in working conditions, and the range of

economic choices women working in subcontracting chains have in selecting employment. For example, more information is needed on the length of time women spend in various stages of such employment (i.e., moves from informal to formal);

- the relationship between lay-offs by gender and business cycles;
- an examination of wage changes and differentials between women and men to determine the effect on compensation of work experience, education levels, uninterrupted work history, support from the household, and discrimination;
- an examination of working conditions to determine differences within a country between formal and informal sector workers or between different firms in the same industry internationally;
- research on subcontracting between shops of the same size. The research so far has tended to focus on the relationship between firms subcontracting to smaller producers including homeworkers, but there is evidence that much of the subcontracting is between firms of the same size and between homeworkers (see Ypeij, 1998);
- a determination of women's economic options in order to assess structural constraints versus personal choice for women when selecting formal or informal work. This type of information should be collected for those directly employed in such firms as well as for those working in extended subcontracting networks;
- what proportion of women's work lives is spent in factories compared to other types of work in the formal, informal, and household sectors;
- the identification of systemic links between informalization and structural conditions. There is a need to critically reevaluate policies which are based on standard models of advanced economies and fail to recognize that mainstream conditions may be inducing informalization (Sassen, 1998).

The survey of the research pointed to a few possible methodological options, including interview techniques, time budget studies, and the need for a combination of macro studies and micro time-use surveys that incorporate gender, race, and class

Key Sources

Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Bonacich et al, 1994; Campbell and Parisotto; 1995; Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996; Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995; Dangler, 1994; Elson, 1995; European Homeworking Group, 1996; Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi et al, 1994; ILO, 1994a; ILO, 1995d; Lawson, 1994; Lui, 1994; Lui and Chiu, 1994; Palpacuer, 1997; Palpacuer and Parisotto, 1998; Park, 1994; Pearson, 1998; Phizacklea, 1990; Reardon et al, 1998; Sassen, 1998; Scott, 1983; Sengenberger, 1992; Smit, 1989; Standing, 1989a; Standing, 1989b; Taeho and Amin, 1995; Tate, 1995; UNIDO, 1994; Van Heerden, 1998; Wilson, 1998; Yalnizyan, 1993; Yanz et al, 1998; Ypeij, 1998.

2.2. Technological Change

Discussion

Technological change is a significant, if relatively invisible, factor affecting the garment industry and, therefore, the position of women workers in the industry. It is one of the key elements that has enabled the globalization and informalization of production in the garment sector.

At the outset, it is useful to highlight two broad conceptual points about technological change that one should keep in mind when considering its relationship to homeworkers in the garment sector.

“...the rate of [women’s] labour participation in the informal sector has increased as a consequence of globalization and the wider introduction of new technologies.” (Reardon et al, 1998: 24)

First, technology is intimately related to social, political, and economic processes. The introduction of new technologies in the industry is linked to issues such as structural adjustment, changing patterns of consumption, gendered assumptions about household and paid work, and, of course, globalization (Reardon et al, 1998; Rowbotham, 1995). In terms of a research agenda, Reardon et al (1998) caution against attributing causal status to technology:

If the introduction of technology has a negative impact on women's working conditions, it is not the technology itself that is to blame. Rather it is the way the technology is introduced, the way the work is organized (1998:5).

The term “new technology” generally refers to computerized technology (Reardon *et al*, 1998). In the garment sector, this relates to industrial developments such as computerized design tools, automated production, and electronic communication between manufacturers and retailers. Older components include earlier changes in telecommunications and transportation which enabled global sourcing and distribution.

Many of these technological developments have an indirect impact on the work of informal workers in the garment sector. Although computerization facilitates a just-in-time production method that relies in part on homeworkers, work processes in the informal sector are not characterized by mechanization or computerized work stations (Reardon *et al*, 1998). There is consensus in the literature that attempts to identify trends or make broad assessments of the impact of technological change on the garment sector and homeworkers in particular are difficult, in part because of the multifaceted nature of the garment sector (ILO, 1995a).

The garment production process can be grouped into three stages: pre-assembly (design, fabric cutting), assembly (sewing, pressing), and post-assembly (distribution, retail) (ILO, 1995a). The majority of women's informal sector garment work is at the assembly stage, particularly in the developing world.

Major technological innovations have primarily occurred downstream and upstream from the assembly stage. At the pre-assembly stage, the most significant have been the introduction of computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), which computerized or automated much of the garment design, pattern-making, and fabric cutting processes (ILO, 1995a; Jezkova, 1995). At the post-assembly stage, the major technical innovation has been the introduction of electronic point-of-sale (EPOS) and electronic data interchange (EDI) systems that bind retailers to the supply chain. Market responsiveness is established through the instant transfer of retailers' sales data to manufacturing and distribution, which modifies the type and quantity of garments manufactured, as well as stock supplied to the retailer (ILO, 1995a).

At the assembly stage, there is general consensus that the amount and impact of direct technological input has been quite insignificant:

The assembly stage (or sewing) of various components making up the final garment has been little affected by technological change...Nor is any major breakthrough in sewing technology likely. Developments here have tended to be incremental rather than fundamental and the basic sewing action seems likely to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future (ILO, 1995a: 7).

Technological innovations have, however, had significant indirect impacts on women in the informal garment sector. These innovations have enabled the fragmentation and decentralization of the overall garment production process developed over the past four decades. Specifically, technological change has been a central factor in giving firms “locational flexibility”—the ability to relocate assembly to international and/or informal/home-based sources (Jezkova, 1995; Mitter, 1995b; Reardon et al, 1998).

In the past decade, the form of technological innovation in the garment sector has shifted from equipment and manufacturing to managerial systems. Various terms “post-Fordism,” “quick response,” and “lean or just-in-time production,” the central aim is market responsiveness. This is accomplished through shorter product runs, greater diversification of product lines, close relationships with suppliers, and quick-response inventory systems. The common denominator underpinning this approach is what the ILO terms “the quest for flexibility” (ILO, 1995a: 13).

While computer-based information technology such as the EPOS is involved, several other techniques are used to maximize flexibility. For the WIEGO project, the most significant are new ways of utilizing and managing human resources. Typically, this consists of multi-tasking, skilled workers, and teamwork (ILO, 1995a). Many of these practices are not applied in the informal sector, however. For instance, multi-skilled teamwork usually involves coordinating teams moving between technologically sophisticated workstations. This is not the arrangement in informal sector assembly work, where individuals usually work on single, basic sewing machines.

In comparison, a key component of the new managerial systems—labour flexibility—depends partly on the continued existence of the informal sector. The quick response system, consisting of short lead times and shifting volumes of production requests, involves irregular employment

patterns. The unregulated nature of the informal sector allows for flexible employment practices as demand fluctuates, all without having to maintain a permanent workforce or compensate workers during periods of low or no production.

Key Questions

- How have technological advances in telecommunications and transportation impacted on production, particularly an increased emphasis and ability to do just-in-time production? What has the impact of these advances been on workers? What future shifts in production can be anticipated?
- Do technologies have differential impacts on homework vs. factory work? domestic producers vs. those producing for export?
- What are the gender implications of the changes in technology? Are women losing jobs when production processes shift to newer technologies?
- Are particular countries included or excluded as a result of technological changes in the industry?
- How have shifts in global production resulting from technological change affected women's capacity to organize? What are some of the issues in a North/South perspective (e.g., satellite imaging now enables designers in India to have direct access to retailer needs)?
- How have new technologies been used as a tool for organizing? How can the Internet be used for organizing? How do these technologies relate to international organizing efforts? Consumer campaigns in the North? Local organizing?
- Which groups are excluded from these technologies? What are the gender issues in access to technologies?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

The WIEGO reference group did not express a great deal of interest in this area although it suggested that further research at the retail level might help understand subcontracting chains. However, there are gaps in knowledge that, if filled, could be useful to HomeNet's activities. Some of these gaps are outlined below.

The consensus in the literature is that direct technological input and innovation in the informal garment sector has been negligible, particularly since this sector is relied upon almost entirely as a way to reduce labour costs. A country with particularly low labour costs may embark on a process of development in the clothing industry using standardized, outdated equipment and traditional forms of work organization. At the beginning, employment may increase considerably and the products manufactured are fairly basic.

As the industry expands and wages begin to increase, however, improvements in the quality of production and modernization of the production structures become essential if the industry is to remain competitive with other emerging suppliers. For a number of years, this scenario has been familiar in Southeast Asia, Morocco, Tunisia, Argentina, Brazil, and Jamaica, countries that no longer have a competitive edge because of their low wage costs. In order to maintain their business volume and employment levels, one strategy is to innovate, adopt modern technology,

and change their organizational structures to improve the quality of their goods and services (ILO, 1995a).

In Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs), higher wages led to the adoption of technological innovation as a means of improving quality and maintaining their share of global garment production (ILO, 1995a; Jezkova, 1995). Whether or not the lowest-wage producing countries such as Bangladesh will follow this pattern and evolve into more technologically intensive, higher-quality production is an open question. Determining the likelihood of this and the ability of women to benefit from these changes would be empirically useful.

The WIEGO research agenda would be simplified if it was recognized that studies reveal conflicting evaluations of the impact of technological change on the garment sector. One response is to disaggregate subgroups or issues that are of interest. There are at least five axes along which it is useful to differentiate the uneven role and impact of technological change in the garment sector: type of garment and production process (standardized, mass-produced or specialized, high quality, just-in-time); comparative advantage of the producing country (cheap labour, automation capability, proximity to retailer, and so on); workplace setting (formal, factory or informal, homework); stage of production (pre-assembly, assembly, or retail); and type of technological impact (direct or indirect) (ILO, 1995a; Taplin, 1994). This typology would be a useful way of beginning an impact analysis.

Key Sources

Baud, 1991; Baud, 1992; Dangler, 1994; Heyzer, 1989; ILO, 1995a; Jezkova, 1995; Marton, 1995; Mitter, 1991; Mitter, 1995a; Mitter, 1995b; Mitter, 1996; Mitter and Ng, 1997a; Mitter and Ng, 1997b; Mitter and Rowbotham, 1995; Moore, 1997; Palpacuer, 1997; Rao, 1995; Reardon et al, 1998; Rowbotham, 1995; Taplin, 1994; UNIDO, 1994.

2.3. Location, Destination, and Ownership of Production

Discussion

A number of other issues related to production which need to be explored include questions about the location of firms, where the product is destined, and who owns the firms.

With increasing pressure to maintain trade competitiveness and reduce labour costs, many enterprises are not only undergoing structural changes, but are also tending to reallocate work to regions with abundant, often female, labour reserves (ILO, 1995b). This change in the international division of labour has led to the emergence of developing countries as major players in the world labour market.

The clothing industry, which is labour intensive, is a typical example of this development. Subcontracting internationally has played an important role in the move to developing countries and has traditionally employed the greatest number of homeworkers (ILO, 1995b). The designs, cuts, and fabrics are often provided by multinational enterprises to producing firms located in developing countries which make extensive use of homeworkers. The manufacture of clothing items has become truly international and has had considerable influence on employment in different countries.

A number of commentators argue, however, that cost should not be the only variable examined to determine why and where enterprises choose to locate production. It cannot account, for example, for why there is any production remaining in the North where the wage differential should have completely wiped out the industry. Some of the other determinants that affect the location of garment production include:

- the size of the firm: large firms are more likely to disperse globally than small (Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995);
- ethnicity, particularly personal connections, can influence where a firm is located (Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995);
- market strategy (Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995);
- other considerations having to do with quality, niche, ability to incorporate a high design content, and market access; for example, firms producing for rapidly changing fashions are less likely to produce offshore (Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995; Moore, 1997);
- trade regulations and agreements such as quotas which, ironically, have helped firms in other nations better compete with US high-end clothing, dispersing production to quota-unrestricted nations, increasing the number of low wage locations exporting apparel, and forcing firms in quota-restricted nations to upgrade into high value market niches (Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995; Lui and Chiu, 1994; Moore, 1997).

Location decisions are, to a certain extent, tied up in the ownership of the firm. Personal connection plays an important part in industry where, for example, US firms owned by Asians are more likely to produce in Asian factories (Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997).

Other issues surrounding the conditions in particular firms on the basis of ownership have not been examined in great depth. While the clothing industry began in Bangladesh with Korean- and Taiwanese-owned factories, over time the industry has become increasingly Bangladeshi-owned and operated because starting costs are low (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Exporters Association, 1996, cited in Delahanty, 1998b). Anecdotal evidence (Delahanty, 1997), suggests that there is a clear perception among workers that conditions are better in Bangladeshi-owned factories, except for the factories in the export-processing zones where conditions are far superior.

The effect of the destination of the products on working conditions is another issue of interest. While the literature is scarce on this issue, a study in West Bengal (India) indicates that conditions in firms producing for export may be superior. Banerjee (1991) argues that export firms are less lucrative than firms producing for the domestic market because they have higher overhead costs and labour expenditures. Because export firms need more organized workshops and more careful quality control and timing, the owners are reluctant to move into the export market. The study also suggests that the owners fear unionization in export firms while the domestic industry using home-based workers can avoid this.

A related issue concerns the impact of foreign clothing on developing countries. This takes various forms: imports of new clothing from lower-cost countries; imports of used clothing from developed countries offered for sale commercially (as opposed to humanitarian aid); and seconds and over-runs from local producers that would otherwise normally be exported but are sold in local markets. There is certainly some indication that such garments have an adverse effect on local, small-scale enterprises, particularly in Africa where the enterprises are unable to compete with low-priced imports (Marton, 1995). In South Africa, the domestic textile industry is currently in crisis due to cheap imports (Hale, 1996). Bigsten and Wicks (1996) argue that the commercialized trade in used clothing is having a significant disincentive effect on developing-country textile and garment industries.

Key Questions

- Do labour conditions differ between factories that are foreign or domestically run and owned? Are there differences in factories producing for domestic or international markets?
- How much has the balance between foreign and domestic ownership shifted in different countries? What is the impact of these shifts on workers?
- Are there distinct organizing strategies to be utilized in each? e.g., organizers can use international pressure (trade levers, shareholder action, etc.) more in foreign-owned workplaces?
- Do overruns and seconds from the export production lead to problems for domestic producers?
- What is the situation with respect to used clothing from the North and its impact on domestic production?
- Are there distinct strategies to be utilized depending on whether a product is for domestic or foreign consumption?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

While there are still a number of unanswered questions about location, the literature does suggest that more attention may need to be paid to issues other than costs and cost minimization when theorizing about this issue for women. In particular, it would be useful to examine strategies pursued by specific firms, especially with regard to competitive strategies to ensure quality, in order to determine what leeway exists for improving working conditions and wages.

The HomeNet reference group felt that the issue of ownership was critical but not often examined (the literature review confirms this). It is especially relevant given that the retailers are not often the owners, but are the power behind the decisions made to move manufacturing facilities. The HomeNet group expressed interest in factories located in Central and South America which are owned by nationals from countries which have filled their quota restrictions, particularly Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. This issue clearly links into work on tracing subcontracting chains.

The literature indicates that the product's destination has an impact on working conditions. It would be useful to examine this in further detail, particularly for homeworkers, as well as the impact on the formal organizing activities of women working in the sector (Banerjee (1991).

Bigsten and Wicks (1996) argue that used clothing imports might negatively impact the textile and garment industries in some countries. Because this was a theoretical study, however, the authors suggest that further empirical analysis is required of this phenomenon, its effects, and the policy considerations arising from it, particularly for women employed in the industry.

Key Sources

Appelbaum and Christerson, 1997; Banerjee, 1991; Bigsten and Wicks, 1996; Campbell, 1993; Christerson and Appelbaum, 1995; Delahanty, 1997; Delahanty, 1998b; Green, 1997; Hale, 1996; ILO, 1995a; ILO, 1995b; ILO, 1995d; Lim, 1997; Lui and Chiu, 1994; Majmudar, 1996; Marton, 1995; Moore, 1995; Moore, 1997; Taeho and Amin, 1995; Van Heerden, 1998.

2.4. Migration

Discussion

With economic globalization and increased global competition, migrant workers have become an integral element in the production of garments. In good economic times, borders will be opened to migrant workers, but they will close at times of recession and workers may be forced to leave (CCIC, 1998; ILO, 1994a). The economic cycle then often regulates the influx and outflow of migrant workers.

“The single most important factor in the internationalisation of labour markets is international migration, and especially the migration of people in the labour force.” (Simai, 1995: 232)

While the economic situation plays an important role in determining why people migrate, other factors are also important: a gender analysis can help explain some of these issues (Crewe and Kothari, 1998). Migration decisions may be determined by, among other things, the “socially determined gender segregated labour markets available” (Chant and Radcliffe cited in Sweetman, 1998). Worldwide, the number of women who migrate for employment purposes has dramatically risen in the last two decades (Grande and Kerr, 1996). Contrary to popular perceptions, seven out of ten women move in search of work rather than for familial reasons (Bullock, 1994). In fact, the most likely trend for migration is predicted to be growing feminization of international labour migration flows.

Female migrants, especially those who do not enter a country through legal channels, are highly vulnerable to exploitation. One reason for their greater vulnerability is that they often go into individualized situations (such as domestic workers and homeworkers) where there is greater isolation and a lower likelihood of establishing networks of information and support (ILO, 1994a). Migrant women are still seen to be a cheap and flexible source of labour and they continue to be over-represented in jobs that are characterized by low pay, low status, and little opportunity for advancement (Crewe and Kothari, 1998). They are unlikely to organize for themselves and traditional unions have often been unwilling to represent them. Many commentators suggest that this pool of exploitable labour is continually shifting with new surges of migration and represents a “hierarchy of vulnerability” (Phizacklea, 1990). Lopez and Schiff (1998) demonstrate that migration of unskilled, financially constrained workers increases with trade liberalization.

Migration can also affect where work is located on the subcontracting chain, with intermediaries more likely to hire subcontractors in their country of origin. As HomeNet has pointed out, many homeworkers in Australia are Vietnamese. Many of those who become subcontractors set up contracting shops through links in Vietnam. This also happens between Germany and Greece, and the UK and Pakistan/India.

Finally, it is also important to understand the impact of migration from the rural areas to the urban centres (Simai, 1995) and the impact on women in the garment sector. More women than men move from the countryside to the city for work, except in Africa (Bullock, 1994).

Key Questions

- How have global trading patterns affected the flow of migrants between countries? from rural to urban areas?
- How has the Asia crisis impacted on migration where workers have been forced to return to their country of origin? In particular, what have the effects of this migration been on the conditions and wages of garment workers in the source country and on the migrants themselves?
- Has the Asian crisis led to a movement of garment workers across borders to source countries? If yes, what have the impacts been on workers and wages?
- What kind of rural to urban migration occurs in the garment sector compared to other sectors? What if any impact does this have on organizing? What opportunities arise as a result?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

There are a number of gaps in the literature on the issue of migration. Some which need to be analyzed further include: the consequences of migration on economic disparities between countries; its contribution to productivity increases; its relationship to exploitation; and its impact on the increasing demand for goods and services (by consumption of immigrants or in the sending countries through remittances) (Simai, 1995).

The complexity of the relationship between gender and immigration, as well as the relationship between immigration and exploitation, also needs to be more fully explored. Sweatshop investigators often blame low wages and poor conditions on immigration (and women) because migrants are willing to work for low wages and in poor conditions. This claim is part of the standard argument that immigration drives wages down and leads to poor working conditions. Green (1996, 1997) argues that immigrant work is constantly being redefined and that to better understand how the role of immigrant work has been defined by the structure of the industry it is necessary to shift the focus from supply to demand.

Some of the most interesting questions arise out of the mass deportation of workers because of the Asian crisis. A study being conducted by HomeNet in Southeast Asia is examining some of the issues around migration. Given the range of topics to cover, this is not emerging as a priority issue for HomeNet, although it may prove an important issue for other stakeholders.

Key Sources

Bullock, 1994; CCIC, 1998; Charoenloet, 1997; Grandea and Kerr, 1996; Green, 1996; Green, 1997; ILO, 1994a; ILO, 1998; Lopez and Schiff, 1998; Phizacklea, 1990; Simai, 1995; Zegers de Beijl, 1997.

3. Responses

The situation of garment workers around the world has resulted in a number of responses. In this section, four key innovative responses are examined: trade mechanisms, legal strategies, international strategies, and workers' organizing strategies.

3.1. Trade Mechanisms to Improve Working Conditions

Discussion

The increase in international trade has not only opened up opportunity for business, it has also opened up the eyes of the world to unethical labour practices. Currently, international trade law does not include measures designed to encourage adherence to international labour standards (Forcese, 1997b: 77). However, pressure has mounted on the WTO to link trade, workers' rights, and labour standards through a "social clause" in international trade agreements. Many favour "social clauses" in international trade agreements because, unlike many other mechanisms, they are enforceable in ways that other international standards are not. In addition to considerations of justice for workers, commentators argue that enforcing such social clauses makes sense because a direct relationship exists between social progress and economic efficiency. In other words, social development is a precondition to lasting economic development.

But there are problems with such clauses, including enforcement provisions, particularly in the context of subcontracting, and the fear that they will only protect traditionally male forms of work (Heyzer, 1997). Further, efforts by developed-country activists to include a set of social standards in trade agreements have been met with strong resistance from developing countries which regard these social clauses as a form of protectionism. Developing nations suspect that, rather than protect workers, the real motive is to reduce their wage-cost advantage and give developed countries an excuse to discriminate against poorer country exports (*The Economist*, 1998). As a result, no standards have been included within trade agreements, with the exception of the NAFTA and Chile-Canada side agreements.

Despite the phasing out of the MFA, tariffs and quotas still play a significant role in trade in the garment sector. Some have suggested making access to preferential tariffs conditional on adherence to certain international labour standards; some countries have begun to use this tactic. For example, the US has a General System of Preferences (GSP) which allows developing countries to export certain goods to the US at reduced duties. In 1984, the US implemented a provision stating that infringement of "internationally recognized worker rights" including minimum age requirements and forced labour prohibitions, would remove a nation from eligibility for GSP preferences. The EU has similar provisions that provide additional tariff cuts to countries meeting certain minimum labour standards.

Many commentators have suggested that the US GSP program has been influential in lobbying for positive change in labour and human rights conditions in many US trading partners. Between 1985 and 1995, 101 labour rights petitions were filed, resulting in 63 reviews of 39 countries: 12

reviews resulted in the withdrawal or suspension of GSP benefits from 10 countries (Forcese, 1997b: 78-79). However, there are also cases where the GSP has been used as a tool of US foreign policy (for example, to deny GSP tariff cuts to Nicaragua under the Sandanistas) or as a protectionist tool in the US.

Key Questions

- What effect does the WTO have on current strategies to improve working conditions in the sector? What opportunities are there to have a social clause? What would need to be included in such a clause to ensure that any strategy does not contravene those agreements?
- Do trade agreements affect other agreements such as international covenants, human rights conventions, and ILO conventions? How can these international agreements be used by workers in their organizing strategies?
- How would the power of the International Financial Institutions to impose labour conditionality on borrowers affect organizing strategies?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

The questions above are largely unanswered. Some bear special emphasis: for example, there have been proposals to transfer tariff revenues to producers who meet the required labour standards in supplying countries. Determining what mechanism would be used to do this remains an important area of study. In addition, identifying the criteria that would be used to determine a country's access to preferential tariffs is also important.

Enforcement of most of the proposed trade mechanisms, as well as consumer labeling and codes of conduct, depend on information about the suppliers. This would be the most useful area of research, not only tracing those subcontracting chains but perhaps more importantly, determining what mechanisms might be used for ensuring that this information is transparent.

Whether northern countries use labour standards for protectionist purposes can be empirically demonstrated and should perhaps be looked at in order to overcome objections from southern partners (see, for example, Lee, 1997).

Finally, it would be useful to conduct research to determine whether any companies have signaled that concerns about conditions and harmonization should be raised at the WTO. We should determine ways to move companies into higher level architecture discussions. Activists have tended to focus on asking companies what they can do on the micro rather than macro levels (Simon Zadek, 1999, personal communications).

Key Sources

Charoenloet, 1997; Delahanty, 1998a; Forcese, 1997b; Heyzer, 1997; Ho et al, 1996; Joekes and Weston, 1994; Lee, 1997; OECD, 1995; OECD, 1996; Romero, 1995; The Economist, 1998; Weston, 1998; Williams and Forde, 1998; Yanz et al, 1998.

3.2. Legal Strategies

Discussion

Efforts to improve the situation of workers through legislation has been an important strategy for action. Homeworkers and many businesses are classified as self-employed or are not registered. As a result, subcontracting allows companies to by-pass existing labour regulations and collective bargaining agreements. Not only can employers save on lower wages, benefits, and taxes, they can also reduce overhead and other costs of formal sector production by avoiding state regulation.

*“The concept of an internationally ‘level playing field’ governing the conditions under which labour would be employed was at the very origin of the ILO.”
(Campbell, 1993: 284).*

One problem with implementing labour legislation is that legal mechanisms are based on assumptions which are challenged by the presence of homeworkers. These assumptions include: that employers are free to organize production as they want; that employers and employees are equal partners; and that the sanctity of the home is paramount. As a result, once production is contracted to a homeworker, it is very difficult for the worker to obtain proper conditions and wages under the law.

There have been many fights for legislative reforms for homeworkers at the national level. Regulation in most countries was first developed by extending the scope of general labour legislation (Vega Ruiz, 1992). In Canada, for example, amending employment legislation to cover homeworkers has been an important strategy (Fudge, 1993; Borowy *et al*, 1993). Other strategies have included the fight for broad based bargaining; implementing joint and several liability through the chain of production; and a central registry for homeworkers (see Yanz *et al*, 1999).

Often, especially in countries with a common law tradition, the courts have made determinations and defined some of the more contentious issues, even defining homeworkers as employees where legislation does not (as in Australia). The nature of the employment relationship between homeworkers and the employer is crucial in determining whether or not general labour legislation is applicable to homeworkers.

The changing role of the state needs to be kept in mind when thinking about legislative changes and reforms. The geographic spread of units of production within and between firms is reducing the importance of purely national or local influences in the organization of work and production. In more market-oriented economies, the role of the state and of government agencies is often reduced (Bailey *et al*, 1993; Marton, 1995). As a result, using international labour standards as a way of ensuring the rights of informal sector workers has been an important strategy.

International labour instruments specify minimum standards which multi-interest groups are able to negotiate. The ILO is the most significant multilateral mechanism for improving and monitoring labour standards. Because home work is an activity that largely escapes administrative controls, the ILO has attempted to bring homeworking into the legislative process

and recently adopted a Convention to protect homeworkers. The Convention would oblige member states ratifying the Convention to “adopt, implement, and periodically review a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situation for homeworkers” (ILO, 1996b). Once ratified by a member state, ILO conventions become binding international obligations (ILO, 1996b).

National policies that ratifying countries must implement are meant to include equality of treatment provisions between wage earners and homeworkers and would also include the following elements: ensuring that workers have written contracts; determining the responsibility of subcontractors; provisions for training; guaranteeing rights in areas such as organizing, occupational health and safety, minimum age requirements, social security and maternity protection. The ILO has proposed recommendations that set out guidelines for national policy and include provisions for collection of data on homeworkers; the regulation of intermediaries, and the establishment of systems of inspection and enforcement of legislation.

Finally, in a report for the EU on homeworkers, Tate argued that programs need to be developed to ensure homeworkers are informed of any change in legislation or existing employment rights (Tate, 1995). The importance of this was brought home by a World Bank study on women workers in Indonesia’s textile, garment, and footwear industries which examined the effectiveness of laws and regulations in ensuring adequate compensation and conditions of work for women in the formal industrial sector (Pangestu and Hendytio, 1997). The study concluded that there was too much emphasis on legislation and not enough on implementation. It suggested that lack of knowledge of labour legislation by workers hinders the enforcement of the legislation. It also noted that labour legislation was widely considered to make it costlier to hire women rather than to help them.

Key Questions

- How has globalization affected the sovereignty of national governments, particularly their ability to legislate on issues of labour standards?
- How have EPZs impacted on national production? Why do host governments encourage the establishment of these zones? Are they in the best interest of the country? What effect do these zones have on national labour standards?
- What are some examples of “best practices” of national/provincial legislation with respect to organizing? What kind of organizing initiatives have led to positive changes in national legislation?
- How have companies responded to changes in the international trading regime?
- How can questions of enforcement be addressed through organizing activities? What institutional mechanisms might be used?
- Have international strategies had an impact on the ability of local organizing to address national legislation?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

In a study of European homeworkers, Tate (1995) suggests a number of areas requiring further study, including social security and tax provisions, as well as other relevant legislation such as, in some countries, immigration and nationality laws which affect the right to work. Measuring the effectiveness of existing national laws and examining systems of implementation, registration, and monitoring are also relevant.

Related is the analysis of ways used by the state to determine women's working conditions by attracting investments on the basis of gender; weakening state regulations and thereby creating hazardous working conditions or informalizing work processes; using police or military power to suppress workers' resistance activities; or influencing fertility patterns with labour supply objectives in mind (via case studies or comparative analysis) (Ward and Pyle, 1995). It is also critical to find ways to include homeworkers in decisionmaking and policy formulation. Part of this research would involve identifying ways of ensuring that legislation is understood by the workers and implemented (Pangestu and Hendyio, 1997; Rakowski, 1994; Tate, 1995).

It is widely believed that increasing economic competition in the era of globalization will lead to downward pressure on labour standards (Bhagwati and Hudec, 1996). Should this happen, the issue of harmonizing international labour standards would become an international public policy issue. However, there is no consensus in the literature about whether such a race to the bottom is inevitable (Freeman, 1994; Lee, 1997). Lee (1997) argues that the inconclusive arguments make it important to resolve the issue through direct empirical evidence. In the meantime, the issue remains controversial among policymakers: it would therefore be useful to analyze it in order to argue for increased harmonization of legislation.

Special attention should be given to the establishment of economic linkages in EPZs with the rest of the economy, as well as to respect for basic human rights at work so as to avoid an "enclave" type of expansion. EPZs should be covered by national labour legislation and core ILO standards, and tripartite advisory committees on industrial relations should be established (ILO, 1996c). The HomeNet reference group recommends conducting research around EPZs and their relation to homeworking, the downward pressure of labour standards and implementation of legislation. Such a relationship would be difficult to assess empirically. However, research which looks at the various strategies firms use in a particular country might clarify some of these issues. In this regard, the Moroccan study proposed by Susan Joeekes would likely provide valuable information (Joeekes, 1998).

Sassen (1998) argues that the concept of the informal sector cannot be understood without reference to the formal sector, particularly to state regulation within that sector. It is informal, she argues, only in relation to the boundaries of state regulation. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics that make informalization possible. Sassen suggests that it would actually be more helpful to talk about regulatory voids rather than violations, since often there is a problematic relationship between the new economic processes and the regulatory frameworks inherited from the past. Some research demonstrates that this is the case; for example, Taeho and Amin (1995) argue that the problematic nature of government involvement in the subcontracted

sector has led to a tendency for small firms to maintain their anonymity. Further research on the dynamics of regulation and informalization could surely prove useful to the organizing activities of women in the sector.

Key Sources

Bailey et al, 1993; Bhagwati and Hudec, 1996; Borowy et al, 1992; Borowy et al, 1993; Campbell, 1993; Chinen, 1994a; Freeman, 1994; Fudge, 1993; Hale, 1996; Ho et al, 1996; Huws, 1995; ILGWU and INTERCEDE, 1993; ILO, 1995a; ILO, 1995b; ILO, 1995d; ILO, 1996a; ILO, 1996b; ILO, 1996c; ILO, 1996d; ILO, 1997c; Joekes, 1998; Lee, 1997; Marton, 1995; OECD, 1995; OECD, 1996; Oxfam UK, 1998; Palpacuer and Parisotto, 1998; Pangestu and Hendyio, 1997; Plant, 1994; Rakowski, 1994; Romero, 1995; Sassen, 1998; Taeho and Amin, 1995; Tate, 1995; UNIDO, 1994; Vega Ruiz, 1992; Ward and Pyle, 1995; Yanz et al, 1998.

3.3. International Consumer Strategies

Discussion

The globalization of the economy means that international strategies are not only more likely, but also more relevant as workers in the North and South face many of the same problems. People in the North are also becoming more aware of their responsibilities as consumers. In line with the increased power of retailers, transnational campaigns are increasingly concerned with affecting a product's image and the way it is marketed and consumed. Consumers have been involved in activities ranging from threatening consumer boycotts, protests, picketing, and leafleting at retail outlets, as well as promotion of media coverage in an effort to connect corporate image with labour practices (Hale, 1996; Ho *et al*, 1996). A number of specific consumer campaigns have been launched which include encouraging the adoption by companies of codes of conduct, effective monitoring and enforcement, and the use of social labels.

“Fashion is of course an almost wholly feminized industry...it is and has been a female sphere of production and consumption. For this reason also fashion IS a feminist issue.”
(McRobbie, 1997:84)

While the reasons for adopting codes are varied (Culpeper and Whiteman, 1998; Forcese, 1997a), codes adopted by companies usually address issues of child and forced labour, compliance with local laws, demands for “fair practices,” references to ILO conventions, and, sometimes, rights to organize and collective bargaining. An increasing number of corporations are also adopting codes of conduct which outline their responsibility for the labour practices of the contractors that manufacture their products. For example, The GAP clothing has a Sourcing Code which requires suppliers (many in developing countries) to meet certain labour-related standards: suppliers must adhere to the code to keep their contract with the company (Consumer Products Industries Branch, 1997).

Most companies adopt codes in order to project a positive image and protect their brand-name or quality reputation. Some are motivated by good intentions, some by bottom-line considerations, some by both. Whatever their reasons, as Clarkson points out, there is growing awareness of the need to move beyond simply having an explicit code or ethic, to identifying whether the program is having a desired outcome (Clarkson, 1997, cited in Delahanty, 1998b). Questions about whether the codes have the desired outcomes have led to a mixed reception to the implementation of corporate codes of conduct.

Many trade unions and NGOs have criticized codes of conduct, arguing that they are nothing more than a public relations ploy. Their only benefit, critics argue, is to ease consumers' consciences rather than to protect workers.

Criticisms of codes include:

- many cover only a limited number of conditions or standards. For instance, codes often do not cover basic labour standards, including the right to organize and collective bargaining;
- many do not specify standards which are precise and measurable. Without precise standards, it is difficult to verify whether there has been a violation of the code;

- codes often do not precisely specify the limits of the corporations' responsibility, including whether it includes subcontractors and suppliers (LBLC, 1997);
- few have explicit enforcement provisions;
- many codes either have no explicit implementation and monitoring provisions or are unable to fulfil their promises in this regard (Forcese 1997a and 1997b).
- codes have been criticized because, if they raise expectations but do not deliver, they may retard or prevent needed legislation. When the consequences of non-compliance are so serious for individual workers, critics argue that voluntary approaches on their own may be insufficient and that legislation would be more appropriate.

While it is important to recognize that "... codes of conduct are not a panacea" (Forcese, 1997b: 43), they do have many positive benefits. According some commentators, codes of conduct offer standards by which corporate behaviour can be judged and corporations held accountable. Other benefits that have been attributed to Codes by various analysts include that:

- they encourage or discourage certain behaviours or activities;
- they stimulate public participation in their development and implementation;
- they address consumer concerns as well as broader matters such as the environment, health and safety, labour standards, and human rights;
- they reduce the need for burdensome and ineffective regulations, including being able to go beyond the minimum standards set by legislation; and,
- they enable standards to be set and adjusted more quickly and efficiently than would laws and regulations.

Although many companies adopt codes either to prevent, or in response to, bad publicity, having a code of conduct can itself make companies more vulnerable to criticism if conditions are found that violate their code. For example, The GAP was forced to admit that its code of conduct was being violated by a contractor in El Salvador: in response, the company agreed to accept independent monitoring of contractor compliance.

There has been some recognition that making codes of conduct as effective as possible is probably the wisest course of action for both corporations and for those interested in labour and human rights standards. As Mark Drake, former senior vice-president of the Alliance of Manufacturers and Exporters of Canada, points out "...take your pick: self regulation now or legislation tomorrow. Public opinion will demand no less." (Drake, 1997:23)

Creating codes of conduct or writing government legislation to halt poor labour practices is a relatively easy task compared to monitoring and enforcing standards. The latter, however, is the key to success of a good international campaign. In a globalized economy, the ability to enforce international standards and monitoring systems is essential to improving labour practices, as well as to assuring consumers that products they purchase are not made under exploitative working conditions.

The question is how to create a monitoring body that is accountable to all concerned. Some labour rights organizations believe that effective independent monitoring can only be led by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) since only they know the local conditions, are trusted

by workers, and are beyond the company's control. This independence is also said to be the most effective way of convincing the public that labour standards are improving.

A great deal of debate has surrounded the different methods of monitoring, as well as the issue of who should do the monitoring.

Southern and Northern labour rights groups are concerned that multinational apparel companies are trying to co-opt and undermine independent monitoring by hiring management firms or prominent individuals to monitor their production, claiming they are "independent NGOs." Labour rights groups insist that to be truly independent, a monitoring body must be trusted by and accountable to the workers as well as the retailer and manufacturer (LBLC, 1997).

Social labels are another consumer-led strategy. Labels are seals on particular products which tell consumers that they are purchasing products that meet certain conditions or standards. There are a number of examples. In the carpet industry, the "Rugmark" ensures that carpets are child labour free and thus eligible for export (UNICEF, 1996). "Green" labeling certifies that products are recycled or environmentally friendly in other ways. The "Fair TradeMark Canada" label is used on coffee and other products guaranteeing that those products were fairly traded. A newer scheme by the Council on Economic Priorities Accreditation Agency (CEPAA) is the Social Accountability 8000 scheme (SA8000) which guarantees that products adhere to a particular, uniform code of conduct concerning labour conditions.

The criteria for these labels can range from "good practices" (usually with the hope of eventually raising those standards) to extremely high standards which companies would find difficult or costly to implement. Monitoring of labels can range from voluntary codes with periodic internal reviews to complex obligatory frameworks with external professional monitoring and auditing and mandatory internal training (Thomson, 1997). Labels provide significant opportunities for public action and education. There is a growing public desire among consumers to "do something." Labeling campaigns such as "Rugmark" seem to create a positive, constructive alternative for consumers. They also generate interest in, and consequently mobilize resources toward the broader causes being fought for (Hilowitz, 1997).

Labeling schemes have often been criticized on the grounds that it is difficult to measure their effectiveness. As one commentator points out, "labels and codes are easy to imagine and hard to enforce." Many developing-country commentators argue that the expense of meeting labeling and certification requirements is a barrier to trade and is simply a protectionist measure. Further, the labeling schemes may divert energy and resources from solutions that are longer-term and sustainable.

Key Questions

- From the perspective of those advocating these initiatives, do they apply to homeworkers or just the formal sector? How are these tools to be used by homeworkers? Is it feasible to use these strategies when the items are produced by homeworkers?

- Do any of these initiatives have the potential to lead to the intensification of home work if formal sector workplaces go out of business as a result of the codes?
- Are there negative impacts on organizing activities in the South? on labour conditions?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

There are a number of gaps in the research on issues of international and consumer campaigns. For example, while those advocating codes of conduct may believe that they should apply to homeworkers, codes generally only apply to factory workers. There is a need to look more carefully at the relationship between codes of conduct, legislation, and homeworking. Some have argued, for example, that increasing minimum wage standards has a negative effect on homeworkers who are paid a piece rate and are then required to increase production in order to comply (Appelbaum et al, 1999). At the same time, there have been moves to design codes which specifically address the issue of homeworkers, such as the Australian Homeworkers Code of Practice. More research on the use of codes to protect informal sector workers and on the relationship between the formal and informal sectors is crucial for understanding the impact of consumer campaigns and codes on homeworkers.

Models of successful monitoring have been developed by a number of groups. They include those developed by the New York-based Council on Economic Priorities (CEP); the GAP-supported pilot project to develop the Salvadoran Independent Monitoring Group; and the Clean Clothes Campaign (Clean Clothes Campaign, 1998a and 1998b). However, more work needs to be done to determine what monitoring and evaluation should look like. There is also a need for systematic data on the effectiveness of self-monitoring. Further, theoretical and empirical analysis is needed on precise and measurable standards because it is difficult to verify whether codes have been violated.

The issue of social labels could be taken to the WTO for dispute resolution if certain countries become unable to sell to traditional markets as a result. The debate over eco-labeling and the discussion about the implications for the WTO are illustrative. The technical standards agreement of the WTO and the ways to circumvent problems in this regard bear further analysis.

For the WIEGO study, the most important issue is that effective consumer campaigns require access to information about how and where products are made. While information on subcontractors involved in domestic production is difficult to obtain, information about overseas suppliers is also scarce. Research on suppliers would be most useful if it is directly tied to particular campaigns. The research proposed by the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) in Canada is a good example of research which deserves support (MSN, 1999). It aims to research direct Canadian investment in offshore garment production and overseas supplier chains of major Canadian retailers. The development of model disclosure legislation for countries would also be a useful tool (Appelbaum et al, 1999).

Finally, two issues bear further examination. The first is the need to look more carefully at the politics of consumer campaigns. These campaigns are based on creating pacts with corporations. They often are not led by workers engaged in efforts to improve labour conditions and sometimes

do not involve the workers themselves at any level; they may have negative effects on homeworkers and other informal sector workers; and they do not necessarily empower either workers or unions (Brooks, 1998a). The second issue involves better linking issues of fashion and consumption with production in order to get a better picture of the relationships between them (McRobbie, 1997).

Key Sources

Bailey et al, 1993; Bhagwati and Hudec, 1996; Borowy et al, 1992; Borowy et al, 1993; Campbell, 1993; Chinen, 1994a; Freeman, 1994; Fudge, 1993; Hale, 1996; Ho et al, 1996; Huws, 1995; ILGWU and INTERCEDE, 1993; ILO, 1995a; ILO, 1995b; ILO, 1995d; ILO, 1996a; ILO, 1996b; ILO, 1996c; ILO, 1996d; ILO, 1997c; Joekes, 1998; Lee, 1997; Marton, 1995; OECD, 1995; OECD, 1996; Oxfam UK, 1998; Palpacuer and Parisotto, 1998; Pangestu and Hendytio, 1997; Plant, 1994; Rakowski, 1994; Romero, 1995; Sassen, 1998; Taeho and Amin, 1995; Tate, 1995; UNIDO, 1994; Vega Ruiz, 1992; Ward and Pyle, 1995; Yanz et al, 1998.

3.4. Organizing Strategies of Workers

Discussion

Many commentators have noted the impact of globalization on trade unionism (Breitenfellner, 1997; Elson and Pearson, 1997; Fudge, 1993; ILO, 1998; Thomas, 1995). The changing nature of the state, the market, and patterns of employment have all challenged traditional union structures. Those structures have a history of throwing up barriers to the participation of women. A number of factors have contributed to this problem for women including: the male-dominated structure of unions; the lack of attention to the issues particular to women; the double burden of women's work day, making it difficult for them to be involved in union meetings and other activities; and the fact that women often work in sectors which are difficult to organize (ILO, 1997b; Khan, 1996).

"It appears to be the case that neither legal regulation alone, nor trade union action alone, nor community action alone can be effective in addressing the problems faced by homeworkers. Any serious attempt to ameliorate their conditions must attempt the difficult task of working on several of these fronts at once."
(Huws, 1995:4)

Traditionally, the labour movement has considered home work exploitative and in direct competition with unionized jobs. As such, much union activity has focused on attempting to abolish the use of homework (Dagg, 1996; Martens and Mitter, 1994c; Prugl and Tinker, 1997). As the labour force has changed, however, it has become clear that unions need to adapt to these changes (Hume, 1996). Although abolitionist sentiments and hostility remain, the influence of feminists and the lobbying efforts of homeworkers have changed attitudes. Some unions have made an effort to move away from blaming homeworkers for their situation to understanding why they are working this way and joining them in solidarity (Martens and Mitter, 1994c; Prugl and Tinker, 1997). Still, trade union structures are not well adapted to scattered workers and the emphasis on wage rates ignores the other survival needs of homeworkers (Rowbotham, 1993).

Although there is no clear model of how to organize homeworkers, various unions have made a number of efforts. Some have begun innovative projects to organize workers, to bargain on their behalf, to lobby for better legislation, to incorporate them into the formal wage structures, and to provide legal advice (Kim, 1996; Prugl and Tinker, 1997). Whatever their problems, unions have also given rise to a number of organizations that successfully work with homeworkers. Some of these include SEWA in India; the Canadian Homeworkers' Association; the Australian National Outwork Campaign; and the Netherlands Women's Union.

While traditional unions provide some hope for organizing women in the formal and informal sectors, there are clearly limitations to this model. A number of other organizing activities, however, may complement the work of unions. Many organizations have grown out of the self-organization activities of women workers themselves, such as, for example, the Japanese Homeworkers' Friendship Association, the National Network of Homeworkers in the Philippines (PATAMBA) and the Women of Colour Quilters' Network. (Huws, 1995).

The range of activities pursued by all these organizations is huge. For example, they do childcare, language, and other training; set up legal clinics and banking and savings schemes; organize

women's cooperatives; and lobby for legal changes (Dau-Schmidt, 1997; Marquez, 1995; Prugl and Tinker, 1997; Rowbotham, 1993; Tate, 1996; Tripp, 1997). Other effective organizing strategies have used a multi-pronged approach and sought action along lines of production and by tying into international structures. Other international activities, such as conferences on homeworking and fact-finding missions, have provided exchanges about conditions and campaigning strategies (Rowbotham, 1993). Most activists working in this area suggest that it is necessary to combine practical improvements and entrepreneurship support with campaigning, organizing, and negotiating (Prugl and Tinker, 1997; Rowbotham 1993). For example, SEWA has been very successful in its use of a mix of organizational activities to support micro-enterprises.

These organizing activities are not without their difficulty. It has been necessary to work with trade unions to overcome divisions and suspicion and attempt to address the more practical questions of how to organize such a fragmented workforce when fear of job loss is very real, particularly where the ease of relocating operations or finding other homeworkers is obvious (Elson and Pearson, 1997; Lim, 1997; Rowbotham, 1993; Tate, 1996). Organizing can be difficult due to competition and distrust among workers themselves (Dau-Schmidt, 1997; Fernandez-Kelly, 1997; Mies, 1982). Alliances formed between homeworkers and unions and NGOs have also often proven difficult. Power imbalances are particularly noteworthy. Women are so afraid of losing their livelihood that they begin to worry about what NGOs are doing, while NGOs perceive the women as being complacent (Theobald, 1996). Whenever alliances are formed, questions of identity, representation, power, and priorities need to be addressed (Theobald, 1996).

It is also important to bear in mind that there are forms of resistance which may lead to more formal organizing activities. In the formal sector, these strategies have taken the form of women insisting that they require unique hormonal breaks, having bridal and baby showers on the shop floor, and claiming to be possessed by spirits (Chinen, 1997; Smyth and Grinjns, 1997). In the informal sector, resistance is often seen closer to home, for example by resisting domestic violence as well as by insisting that economic activity be taken seriously (Hossfeld, 1990). However, as Hossfeld (1990) argues, while resistance strategies may alleviate some oppressive conditions in the short run, collective and organized resistance is more effective in ensuring women workers' long term empowerment.

Given the connection between globalization and economic restructuring, as well as changing gender relations, it is essential that linkages and alliances occur at the local, national, and international level (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996; Marquez, 1995). A number of groups have documented some of these regional and international strategies and actions, often with a view to linking workers to the companies for which they work (see Committee for Asian Women in Cheng-Kooi, 1996; Shaw, 1996). The need for these linkages is not simply emotional solidarity support, but also to strategize on ways of influencing the interlocking industrial, economic, and political structures and processes which affect women workers in the sector (Chhachi and Pittin, 1996).

Key Questions

- What kinds of transnational alliances are possible? Have any been successful? What is the impact of protectionist impulses by Northern groups on this kind of alliance?
- How does gender play into organizing with unions, particularly in an institutional structure largely dominated by men and a group of workers who are predominantly women? Are there examples of successful unionizing activities that address this imbalance?
- What are some of the challenges of organizing informal sector workers in the context of traditional unions? How do formal sector protectionist impulses play out?
- What is the level of awareness among women being organized in terms of their conditions and rights etc.? How important is this awareness to changing women's conditions of work?

Research Gaps and Recommendations

Gaps in the literature which could be useful areas for further analysis include:

- the various forms of organizing in the informal sector, including acquiring the necessary information required in order to organize effectively;
- while the negative influence of race and gender on union organizing has been researched to a certain extent (Martens and Mitter, 1994c; Soldatenko, 1991) a similar analysis has not really been undertaken on the less formal activities of homeworkers;
- making improvements for women workers in the South requires understanding and incorporating regulations concerning multinational investment and development aid from the North;
- if organizing is effective, firms have the option of moving elsewhere. Some work has been launched to attempt to find mechanisms to address this problem at the firm level: this needs to be explored further (Weston, 1999).

The most important recommendation is that action oriented research can, in itself, raise the awareness of workers about their ability to organize and act to improve their conditions (Parveen and Ali, 1996). In an analysis of a number of projects which have led to organizing activities, Huws (1995) states that:

All the projects have engaged in some form of information gathering exercises on the needs of people they are seeking to organize and the conditions under which they are living and working. Sometimes the process of research also becomes a means of reaching homeworkers and informing them about the projects. The results of the research may then be used to inform other aspects of the projects work. For instance, political lobbying, publicity, fundraising or project design (Huws, 1995).

Given the significance of basic research and data collection, it would appear that one of the most significant ways of organizing workers is to invest in the collection of this data. As noted in much of the literature, the process of organizing homeworkers is both time consuming and costly. Given limited resources, it might be most beneficial for the WIEGO research studies to determine likely areas for organizing and beginning these kinds of action-oriented research

projects. Such research and documentation should be undertaken by the workers themselves, augmented by parallel or joint research by activists/researchers who are not necessarily employed in the specific workplace (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996).

The HomeNet reference group suggested a number of countries which could benefit from this type of research, and particularly highlighted the need for research in India. As the ILO has noted (ILO, 1995d) there is no reliable information on homeworking in Africa. Clearly, this is also a region which would benefit from this kind of research. Annex 1 provides some detailed information on the garment sector internationally which may provide a good starting point for determining the country studies.

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Borowy et al, 1992; Borowy et al, 1993; Breitenfellner, 1997; Bullock, 1994; Cheng-Kooi, 1996; Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996; Chinen, 1997; Dagg, 1996; Dangler, 1994; Dau-Schmidt, 1997; Elson and Pearson, 1997; Fernandez-Kelly, 1997; Fudge, 1993; Gender and Development, 1996; Ghvamshahidi, 1995; Ho et al, 1996; Honig, 1996; Hossfeld, 1990; Hume, 1996; Huws, 1995; ICFTU, 1995; IGC, 1998; ILO, 1995d; ILO, 1997b; ILO, 1998; Kabeer, 1991; Khan, 1996; Kibria, 1996; Kim, 1996; Lazo, 1996; Lim, 1997; Lui, 1994; Marquez, 1995; Martens and Mitter, 1994c; Mies, 1982; O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 1995; Pangestu and Hendytio, 1997; Parveen and Ali, 1996; Prugl and Tinker, 1997; Ross, 1997; Rowbotham, 1993; Shaw, 1996; Smyth and Grinjns, 1997; Soldatenko, 1991; Tate, 1996; Theobald, 1996; Thomas, 1995; Tripp, 1997; Vega Ruiz, 1992; Weston, 1999; Yalnizyan, 1993; Yanz et al, 1998.

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