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Employment Policies for Economic Empowerment

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Panel 1
Policies and programs for women's economic autonomy: design and evaluation

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Women's Economic Empowerment

Empowerment refers to increasing strength of individuals or communities in the different spheres of life such as economic, political, social, spiritual etc. It also refers to instilling confidence in people in their own capacities.

Gender empowerment or women's empowerment essentially refers to empowering women in general and changing power relations between men and women in favour of women in particular. Women in developing countries are observed to be lagging behind men in different spheres of life such as, labour and employment, health and nutrition, education and skills, asset ownership, political and social participation etc, with the result that power of decision making in the multiple spheres of life lies more with men than with women.

On economic front, women own no/low assets as compared to men. This restricts their access to credit, to technology, to markets and to upward mobility. Women also lag in human capital, in education and skills, causing their lower status in the field of labour and employment, as compared to men, reflected in their low participation, poor occupational diversification, low employment status, low wages etc. Women have lower mobility and have overall poorer prospects for upward mobility in the labour market and in the economy. On the human development front, women are observed to be lagging behind men in literacy and overall educational achievements, health status and overall human development. Human and gender development indices in developing countries show this very clearly. In addition, women also lag behind in leadership and political participation, in enjoying autonomy and freedom as well as in socio-cultural participation.

It is frequently argued that the highly unequal division of unpaid domestic work between men and women within the household is at the root of all pervasive gender inequalities. The high burden of unpaid domestic work on women that constitutes household upkeep and management (i.e. washing, cleaning, cooking, shopping for the household etc) as well as care related work (i.e. care of children, the old and sick in the household and others in the household), tends to deprive women of opportunities in life in many ways. Since this work is (1) unpaid (without remuneration), (2) repetitive and boring, (3) time consuming and frequently a drudgery, and (4) without any retirement or pension and without any prospects of upward mobility. It is usually un-recognized, invisible in national statistics (unless time use surveys are conducted), and treated as inferior. The social norms, based on this division of labour put women further in an inferior position within and outside the household. In fact, this unjust and unfair division of labour is at the root of power relationship between men and women. It is also largely responsible for all pervasive gender inequalities in a society.

Economic empowerment is only one component of the overall empowerment of women. It is to be noted that it cannot bring about overall empowerment of women. However economic empowerment can be an important component of their empowerment, as it can trigger the process of empowerment for women.

Employment Policies and Economic Empowerment of Women

Productive employment with “decent work conditions” can improve women’s economic status in multiple ways: firstly, it can help women earn incomes of their own, and this can give them freedom to spend cash on the goods and services of their choice. Though women do not always get this freedom to spend automatically and in some cases the incomes go in the hands of the men, it is generally observed that women’s status in the family improves when they start bringing cash in the household. Secondly, many times women count in decision making when they earn incomes. And thirdly, their exposure to outside world while working in the labour market tends to make them confident improve their self esteem.

There are broadly three approaches towards enhancing employment opportunities for women: (1) wage employment or public works programmes, frequently with a guarantee of employment, (2) employment opportunities in the mainstream economy mainly as wage / salary earners and (3) self employment promotion through entrepreneurial development programmes. All the three types of employment programmes have been implemented in almost all developing countries on a small or large scale.

This presentation discusses these approaches and examines how they impact on women's empowerment, keeping in mind the likely impact of these programmes on time use patterns of men and women. We have used two studies of ours to discuss the positive and negative impacts of these programmes on women's well-being, and on women's economic empowerment.

Employment Guarantee Programme and Women Case of India

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was passed by Indian parliament in 2005 and the Scheme designed under the Act was implemented in February 2006. The main objectives of NREGA are (1) to guarantee 100 days of work at the legal minimum wages to each household that demands work in rural India, (2) to generate productive assets in the economy and thereby enhance livelihoods of people and (3) to empower local self governments at the village level by ensuring their participation in the planning and implementation of NREGA, and thereby strengthen decentralized democracy.

It is to be noted that NREGA is not designed with the objective of promoting gender equality. As far as women's role in NREGA is concerned, NREGA offers 33 percent employment to women, guarantees child care facility at the worksite and provides scope to women to participate in planning and implementation of NREGA and in conducting social audit as members of Gram Sabha and of Gram Panchayat. Apart from these, there is no direct focus on women's empowerment or gender equality under NREGA. It is argued that one cannot load too many objectives on NREGA as that will diffuse its main focus.

In spite of the absence of any direct focus on gender equality, women have participated in NREGA in a big way: More than 50 percent of the employment generated has gone to women. In some pockets this share has gone up to 70-80 percent. It seems that NREGA has impacted on women positively as well as negatively.

On the positive side, women have benefited in multiple ways under NREGA: women have participated in NREGA on a large scale in most states in India; have received equal wages with men in several areas and earned incomes of their own; single women households and female -headed households have particularly benefited in some pockets as NREGA provided them minimum incomes and food security; and women participants are frequently empowered in terms of their improved say in decision making. NREGA has provided employment to women, both engaged in the labour market in a scattered manner as well as housewives; it has helped them to mobilize to develop collective strength and social capital; and helped them to participate in village

level institutions like Village Assembly, Vigilance Committees, Social Audits etc. By accessing these opportunities women have frequently influenced intra-household relationships in their favour and acquired improved bargaining in and outside home (Hirway 2011).

Though these developments do break some barriers to gender equality, they do not remove all the barriers to gender empowerment. However it has triggered or initiated the process of empowerment of women. This process can be strengthened or carried forward through measures like (1) giving women a just share in the ownership of NREGA assets, (2) adding new assets in the list of permissible assets for women, mainly the assets that reduce unpaid work of women, (3) provision of social security including maternity benefits to women workers to improve quality of NREGA work, (4) independent bank account or post office account in women's name rather than in the name of the amn of the household, and (5) providing suitable implements for women to carry out their work on NREGA.

On the negative side, NREGA has impacted adversely on the time use of women, resulting in severe time stress that causes depletion of human capital on the one hand and reduction of women's physical well-being on the other hand. The time use of young girls also seems to have changed impacting adversely on their education and well-being. It is true that this impact is likely to be there on all women workers employed in the labour market; however NREGA women workers deserve special attention because (1) unlike other work in the labour market, work on NREGA is very strenuous, frequently consuming more than 2500-3000 calories and (2) women's participation in this flagship programme is very high, with 50 percent average share of women in the total employment, reaching 70-80 percent in some regions. Large number of housewives, who were outside the labour force and were not used to hard work, have entered the labour market for NREGA work, and this has dramatically raised the burden of work on them. Though child care facility on worksites (which is frequently not available) is given on NREGA works to help women, this is far from adequate to address the problems arising from the changed time use of women.

Our time use survey in a pocket where NREGA has done well has shown that NREGA impacts on women's time use highly adversely in multiple ways causing increased gender inequalities: Women workers spent about 14 hours a day on total work, which includes NREGA work and domestic work & care. It increased radically the working time of women, by more than 30 percent for women who were working in the labour market earlier and by 160 percent for women who were engaged only with domestic work (house wives) earlier. Men, on the other hand spend on an average 8 hours per day on labour market work and 45 minutes on other work (i.e. domestic work and care). That is, they put in less than 9 hours on total work, which is 5 hours less than what women

spend. That is, women spend about 57 percent of their total time on work as against 30 percent of men, with the result that they get about 5 hours less time for sleep, rest, relaxation and other personal time.¹

The time use survey also showed that almost all women spend, on an average, 110 minutes on multi-tasking, i.e. performed two activities simultaneously. It increased their work intensity as well as time stress. For example, they cook while they take care of children or the elderly in the household; they shop for the family when they go to fetch water; they teach children while doing household work; or they eat food while taking care of children; or watch TV while chopping vegetables. 18 percent women sometimes performed more than two tasks also! In the case of men only about one fifth men are observed to be doing multi-tasking, performing two activities simultaneously, such as, eating and watching TV, reading newspaper and taking care of children or taking the child along while shopping. On NREGA work however they perform only one activity.

Almost all women feel “rushed” all the time; experience time stress and severe shortage of time. They get up around 5.00 in the morning, and finish cooking, washing, cleaning, fetching water (some times) and care of children early in order to reach the worksite by 8.00 am. After 12.00 they go back and finish remaining cooking, feeding, cleaning and washing etc fast to reach the work-site by 2.00 pm. And after 6:00 pm or so (depending on the quantum of work to finish to earn the minimum wages) they come home and again rush to take care of household work including fetching water.

There is not much sharing of domestic work for these NREGA workers by their household members though some changes have taken place in sharing this work in the household. Child care is shared only by 30 percent men, and on average these men spend 30 minutes on child care. As against this, 81 percent women workers are engaged in child care (other women workers do not have small children) and they spend, on an average 40 minutes on child care. 44 percent men help in housekeeping (mainly shopping for the household) and spend on an average 25 minutes on this work. Elderly women as well as young girls in the household help women workers in domestic work and care.

The point worth noting however is that in 36.4 percent cases young school going girls stay at home to take care of house work or / and to care for young siblings when their mothers go to work. Though there is no case of withdrawal of girls from the school

¹ Women, on an average get 432 minutes (7 hours and 12 minutes) for sleep as against 510 minutes (8 hours and 30 minutes) by men; spend on an average 12 minutes on watching TV against 40 minutes by men; get 8 minutes for gossip as against 100 minutes by men (while eating paan masala or smoking bidi) and 19 minutes for rest against 60 minutes by men.

noted, it is reported by school teachers that during the period of NREGA absenteeism among girls increases substantially. The time use of these girls also indicate less time available to them for studies, as they have to help their mother in her work. In short, sharing of household work by men is limited. The major sharing comes from elderly women and young girls. Men and boys spend less than one hour on household work.

In spite of the increased burden of work, women workers do not complain about this for the fear that this work, which has come as a great boon, is not taken away. Most of them however did complain about back ache and body ache. Though they eat better than before, they spend huge calories on work, causing overall negative impact on their nutrition. Also, a major complaint is that they are not able to spend enough time for child care when they go for NREGA work. That is, child care suffers when mothers go to NREGA work.

This changed time use has serious implications for the economy, with about 12 million women participating in NREGA in the country. Firstly, NREGA is likely to affect nutrition levels of women adversely who are already malnourished. It is likely to have severe impacts on women's health, maternal mortality, women's mortality and on children's health when they are born. Secondly, it will result in depletion of human capital of women. And thirdly, less time available for children than before as well as girls' increased involvement in household work can also cause adverse impact on future opportunities for the younger generation.

In short, though "gender" is not an objective of this flagship programme, it affects women and children in an unjust and unfair manner. There is a need to address these impacts, as they just cannot be ignored!

One can say that unpaid work of women should be treated as hidden vacancies for the mainstream economy and these vacancies should be filled in by transferring these services to paid work in the main stream economy. NREGA can contribute significantly here. It needs to be underlined that reduction in unpaid work of women will have a highly positive impact on the macro economy also in terms of optimum productive use of labour (both male and female labour) in the economy and optimization of economic growth through optimum use of the total labour in the economy. With half the labour (i.e. women labour) stuck in drudgery and low productivity activities in unpaid work, the economy will not reach its maximum potential.

Women's Employment in Mainstream Economy Wage and Self Employment

Trade liberalization for export promotion is seen as an important avenue for employment of women in developing countries. There is ample evidence to show that women's employment has increased significantly in export industries in a large number of countries. This is frequently seen as "feminization of Labour" by many scholars.

Studies have shown that producers of export goods are subjected to several pressures from the global production networks, which are usually in the hands of large multinational corporations (MNCs) in the global market. The MNCs and TNCs which dominate global production networks keep a few core activities with themselves and distribute labour intensive production activities among developing countries, depending on the advantages in the value chains. Exporting industries, which are in cutthroat competition with each others, are at the receiving end under this lop-sided structure in the global market. They are forced to restructure their production (1) through technological up-gradation to compete in the global market; (2) expansion of size of the units through vertical and horizontal integration of production to increase the control over the value chains for better bargaining in the global market; (3) acquiring flexibility in production to address fluctuating demand in the volatile global market; and (4) by minimizing cost of production, mainly by cutting labour costs, to compete in the global market. The restructuring of production leads to restructuring of labour through subcontracting of production to acquire flexibility and to reduction in cost of labour, both leading to creation of sub-standard employment for workers. Women with their typical supply behaviour dominate as informal workers and home-based workers (as compared to men workers) and remain at the bottom ladder of employment. It is observed that most of the new employment is generated for informal workers, the wages and working conditions of workers are at the bottom, and the workers are more or less deprived of any social protection; The conditions of women workers tends to become worse than those of men workers, with the widening of gender gaps in almost all labour market outcomes.

Our study of one of the dominant export industries in India (also in the world), namely the textile and garment industry (ILO 2011) shows that the employment of women has increased at a much faster rate than that of men, in both textile and garment industries. In the case of textiles, the employment of women has increased at an annual rate of 1.5 percent during the past decade, as against a mere 0.1 percent of men. The corresponding rates for the garment industry are 33.1 and 8.2 for women and men respectively. That is, the increase in employment of men and particularly women is largely in the unorganized informal sector. Both textiles and garment industries show a rapid growth of unorganized and home based work for women. In fact, women predominate as home based workers, as compared to men workers, with their share increasing dramatically from 58.9 in 1994-95 to 93.1 in 2006-07. Since it is possible to segment the labour market based on some of the characteristics of women workers

(such as high flexibility of women workers and their special supply behaviour, their docile nature and low interest in unionization) make it possible to segment the labour market to treat them differently by providing them temporary, part time or casual employment at low wages. That is, it is possible to employ more women than men to reduce costs to export in a competitive market. This raises the wage gap.

Women workers, who are predominant as home-based sector in the garment industry, receive the lowest wages / incomes among all the categories of garment workers. A time use surveys of a systematically selected sample women workers was conducted to understand time use patterns of home-based workers and their household members (Hirway 2011). The sample home-based workers has been drawn systematically, based on the typology of home-based garment workers: (1) their work, i.e. stitching, finishing, sticking accessories etc, (2) the production organization, i.e. home work taken from trader / contractor self employed work and mixed work, (3) social-religious group of workers and (4) location of work, i.e. the types of location in Ahmedabad city, one of the biggest garment centers, also in the business of export of garments. The major findings of the survey are produced below:

About 30 percent home-based workers do not have a separate room for carrying out home-based work, while 70 percent workers have a separate room for carrying out this work at least for a few hours a day.

- There is no uniform pattern of working time, as the starting time, the closing time and the number of “working periods” on garment stitching is different for different workers, depending on the demand from their domestic responsibilities.
- The total working hours fluctuate between 6 hours to 12 or even 14 hours depending on the season as well as convenience of workers.
- On an average, there are about 2 household members helping the main worker. The number of helpers varies from 0 in one case to 2-3 in most cases. The average time put in by family members in garment work comes to about 6 hours, which is not small.
- Home-based workers spend significant time on non-SNA work, i.e. household upkeep (washing, cleaning, sweeping, cooking, shopping for the household etc) and care work (care of children, the old and other needy members of the household). On an average these workers spend 262 minutes (4 hours and 22 minutes) on this work. The time varies from 60 minutes to 293 minutes (4 hours and 53 minutes),

depending on the presence of young children in the household, structure of the household (presence of elders to take care of children), household income etc.

- Other household members together spend more minutes on garment work than the main workers put together. This is indeed a family wage work!
- Boys and girls below 14 help in the “economic” (SNA) activities (this includes garment and other SNA work) as well as in non-SNA activities. They spend on an average 20.12 minutes on this work. In addition, the girls also spend one hour and 23 minutes on HH work. Generally girls get much less time on studying, playing, sleeping and relaxing.
- On an average, home-based workers spend 34.33 percent of their time on SNA work as against 18.62 by all women and 27.59 percent by men. However women also spend 31.75 percent of their time on non-SNA work against 2.38 percent by men. In all, therefore women spend 50.37 percent of their time on work while men spend 29.98 percent time on work. Men get more time (63.07 percent) for personal activities, that includes watching the TV, listening to radio, socialization, relaxation , reading newspapers as well as sleep as compared to women, who spend 49.03 percent of the time on these activities. .

The above discussion has shown that the practice of home-based work, which has expanded rapidly under trade liberalization, has given an opportunity to many (mainly women and some men) to get engaged in production of goods (in this case garments) but with poor quality of employment..

Home-based work subsidizes producers of garments. They enjoy two main advantages: (1) they can increase and reduce the production as per the orders received and (2) they can reject their product if not of good quality. In addition, it saves on the space for production, as work is performed by workers in their homes; it saves an overheads like electricity for fan, light and for running the machines; it saves their expenditure on providing facilities like drinking water, toilets etc; it saves expenditure on maintaining safe and clean surroundings for work; and frequently it also saves their expenditure on raw materials. Employers save on social security including maternity benefits.

In short, globalization policies have promoted a highly exploitative system thanks to the sharing of unpaid work by men and women: Firstly, this system of work traps workers in low skill, low productivity activities, providing them little scope for improving productivity through skill formation, as there is not much scope for providing them new

skills or higher level skills due to their production organization and due to their low semi literate background. This is a major loss to the economy. Secondly, the huge burden of work, both SNA and non-SNA, on these workers tends to result in human capital depletion. The low wages and low incomes add to this depletion leading to low nutritional status of the workers. This tends to reduce their productivity, which in turn, tends to reduce their capacity to earn. This implies less than optimum use of labour, having implications for the macroeconomic growth. Again, home-based work makes it possible to employ children in the work, with the result that children's contribution, in terms of hours put in, is significant. The conditions of girl children are particularly difficult as they frequently perform three kinds of work: garment work, household work and taking care of young siblings. There is therefore a tendency to withdraw girls after 7th Standard or even earlier. The time use of children under the system of home based work has implications for the future of these children. The rapid increase in the home-based work should be seen from this point of view also.

Inferences

Both the case studies show that the apparently successful looking programmes for promotion of employment can have highly negative impacts if the unpaid work of women is not addressed adequately. This has important implications for designing and assessing employment programmes as well as macroeconomic policies, such as the policy of trade liberalization.

If the impact of a policy is assessed conventionally on the basis of its impact on exports and GDP, or even on overall employment, it does not bring out the reality at the ground level. The first major recommendation therefore is to make unpaid work of affected households visible. This requires data on the time use of SNA and non-SNA workers as well as on personal activities of affected people. This data can be collected by undertaking an area based or issue based time use survey. That is, one does not need a large scale or national time use survey for this purpose. A focused and small time use survey is neither too expensive nor too time consuming.

The other implications are about designing programmes that address the uneven sharing of unpaid work by men and women. The major focus while addressing unpaid domestic work should be on (1) recognizing unpaid work, (2) reducing it by transferring it to mainstream economy, (3) improving its productivity and (4) redistributing it by integrating it in macro policy making.

In short, there is a need to integrate gender concerns into mainstream policy making, i.e. in employment policies as well as in the trade policy, industrial policy, labour policy etc.