



Department of
**International
Development**

Women's access to market opportunities in South Asia and the Middle East & North Africa

Barriers, opportunities and policy challenges

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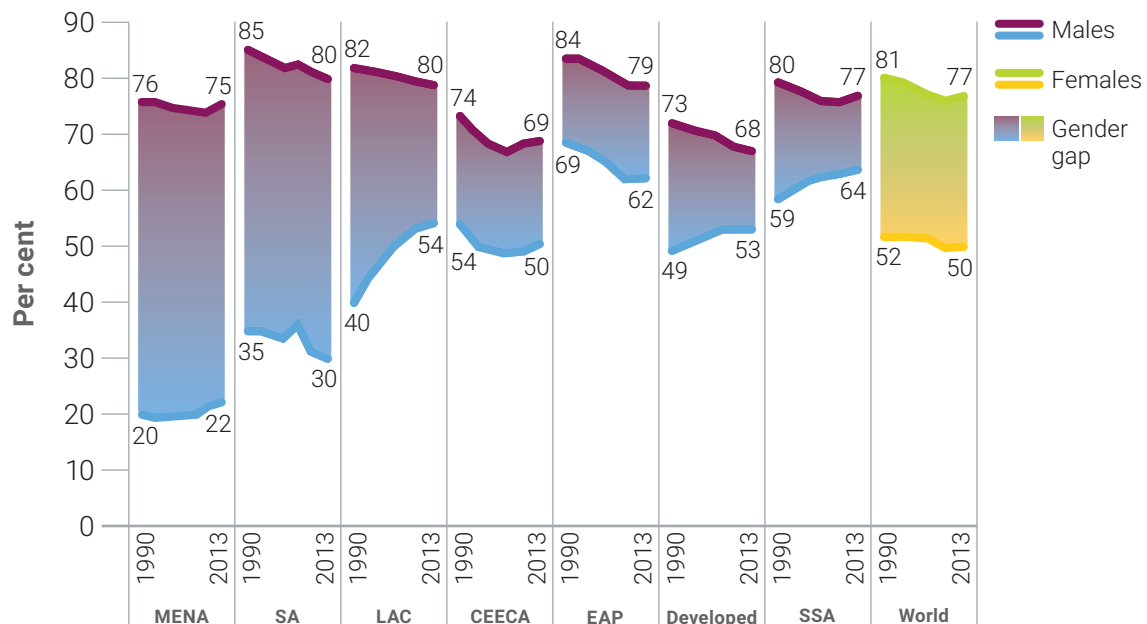
1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the workshop

According to the opening statement of the 2004 ILO report on global trends in women's employment: "One of the most striking phenomena of recent times has been the increasing proportion of women in the labour force, enabling women in many regions to use their potential in the labour market and to achieve economic independence". Although women continued to have lower rates of labour force participation than men in much of the world, there had been a gradual reduction in the gender gap in participation rates. Various factors have played a role in this: declining fertility rates, rising rates of female education and aspirations, new opportunities for work represented by the rise of labour-intensive export manufacturing and services and so on. The pace of increase in female participation rates has slowed down, and even reversed, in a number of regions but a striking feature throughout this period has been the persistently low rates of female labour force participation in the MENA and South Asia regions. Male labour force participation rates in the two regions are no different from other regions of the world, but female participation rates have remained intransigently low (Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE BY SEX
AND REGION, 1990-2013**



Source: UN Women (2015)

Various attempts have been made to explain this striking regional feature. An early contribution came from Boserup (1970) who described both South Asia and MENA as regions of male farming, reliant on the plough, as opposed to hoe-based female farming found in much of sub-Saharan Africa. She also drew attention to specific features of their social organisation: (“the veil”, “polygamy”, “caste”). More detailed efforts to identify the distinct cultural features of these regions can be found in Caldwell (1978) who described them as “the patriarchal, patrilocal, patrilineal belt” and Kandiyoti (1988) who characterised them as the “belt of classic patriarchy”. And certainly, despite differences in religious practices, economic structures and political regimes, these regions shared a great deal in common – the practice of female seclusion, patrilineal inheritance, patriarchal family norms, patrilocal marriage patterns and, till recently, strong son preference and discrimination against daughters.



At a time when policy makers in different parts of the world have become increasingly interested in promoting women's engagement with the labour market, the persisting barriers in these regions pose a challenge. Attempts to explain these barriers have found it necessary to factor the regional specificities of cultural norms and kinship structures into standard economic analysis of preferences, constraints and opportunities. Policy efforts to expand women's economic opportunities in these regions will clearly also have to factor these regional specificities into the design of interventions.

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It was to address the barriers, challenges and policy opportunities that characterise the market for female labour in the MENA and South Asia regions that the Department for International Development and the Middle Centre at the LSE collaborated with Ashoka University, India and the Economic Research Forum, Egypt to convene a workshop with scholars who have a long track record of research and policy engagement on these issues in the two regions. The aim was to take stock of what we know about the barriers to women's engagement with the labour market, to share our collective insights into policies and programs that have been effective and to consider what this tells us about future efforts. This report synthesises the discussions at the workshop⁴.

4 The workshop was funded by the research grant (ES/NO14723/1) received from the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and brought together a number of other ESRC/DFID grantees as well as recipients of grants from UKAID. We also gratefully acknowledge the excellent support provided by Priya Raghavan from the Department of Gender Studies in helping organise the workshop and producing this report. Our thanks also to the LSE Design Unit for their work on the production of this report.



1.2 Rationales for the promotion of women's labour market options in MENA and South Asia

The workshop focused on the challenge of increasing and improving women's labour market options in regions of the world where these options have historically been extremely restricted. Participants agreed that efforts to address this challenge would not achieve a great deal without commitment on the part of policy makers within these regions. Such a commitment has not so far been very forthcoming, but there are strong arguments in its favor. Some of the arguments speak to the continued preoccupation of policy makers across the world with economic growth, some to the growing concern with the economy of wellbeing while others make the argument in terms of gender justice.

The **first** set of arguments is based on the growing body of evidence that suggests that greater gender equality in labour force participation and education contributes to economic growth⁵ - and the South Asia and MENA clearly lose out on this front. Klasen and Lamanna (2009) demonstrated that greater female labour force participation and education contributed to economic growth, both directly through their engagement in activities that were counted as part of growth, but also indirectly through the effects in reducing fertility levels and increasing the survival chances, health and education of the next generation, the "human capital" effect. They also estimated that the combined "costs" of gender gaps in education and employment were higher in MENA and South Asia than elsewhere in the world. A recent IMF publication came to a similar conclusion (Kochhar *et al.*, 2017). It estimated that the average macro-economic losses resulting from gender inequality in the labour market amounted to 15.4 per cent of the GDP in the advanced OECD economies, 17.5 per cent of the GDP in developing countries but rose to 38 per cent in the MENA region and 25 per cent in South Asia⁶.

5 See Kabeer and Natali (2013) for a review of this literature.

6 imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/03/closing-the-gender-gap-dabla.htm



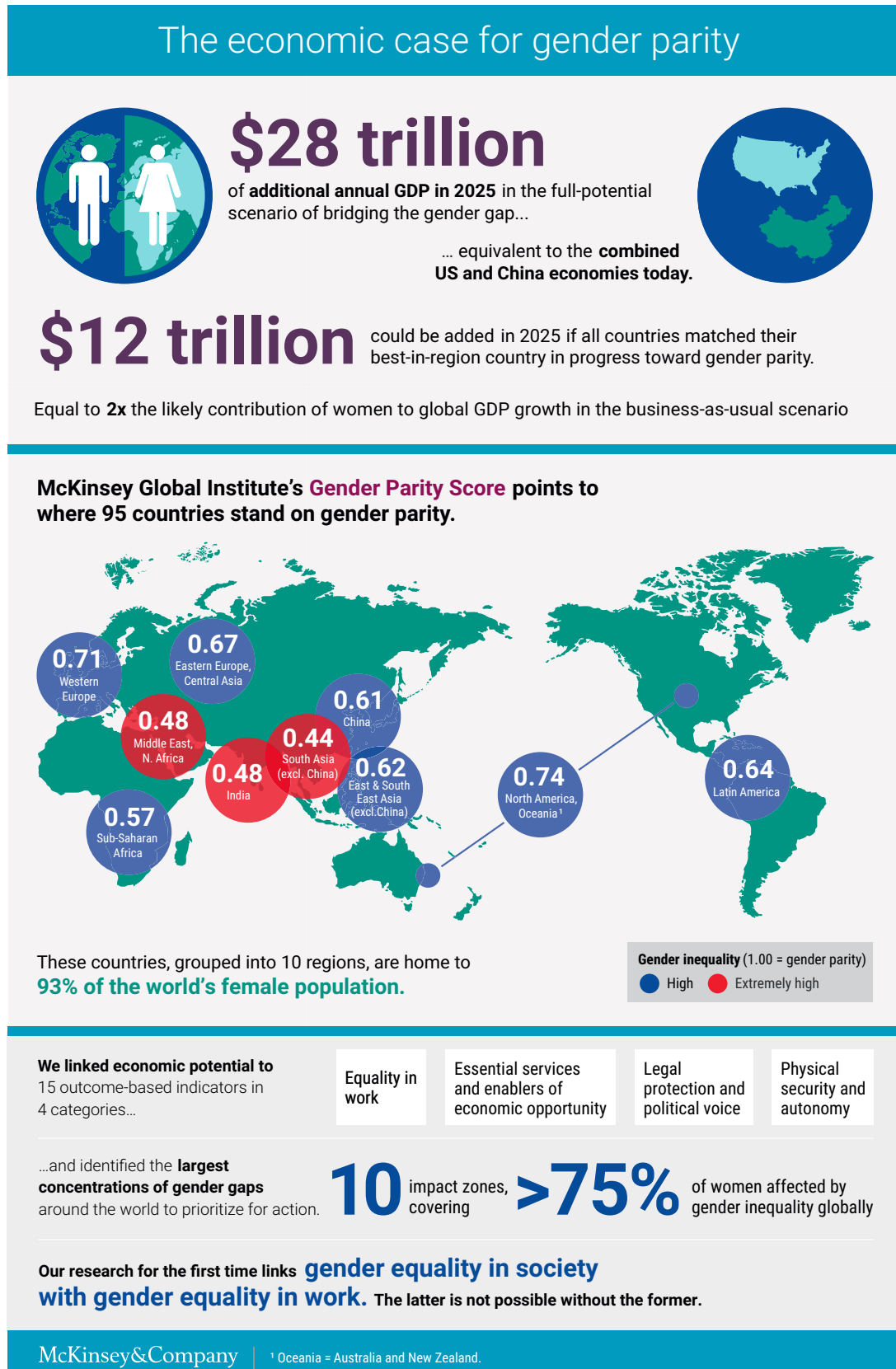
The McKinsey Global Institute (2015) took a more multi-dimensional approach to gender inequality. Its Gender Parity Score (GPS) was based on indicators of equality in the economic, physical, social, political and legal domains. The report found that gender inequality in economic opportunities appeared to drive gender inequality in these other dimensions: there were virtually no countries that reported a high score on gender equality in society but low gender equality in work (Figure 2). However, while none of the 95 countries covered by the report achieved full gender parity (GPS of 1), South Asia and MENA stood out as the regions with the lowest scores: 0.44 for South Asia and 0.48 for MENA.

The report estimated that full gender parity in the world of work, in other words, parity in participation in the labour force, parity in hours worked and parity of representation in each sector of the economy, could add as much as \$28 trillion to the annual global GDP by 2025, raising global economic output by 26 per cent, compared to an unchanged scenario. The less ambitious scenario, premised on the assumption that every country bridged its gender gap at the same rate as the fastest-improving country within its region, would still increase the global GDP by an annual \$12 trillion by 2025. While both wealthy and lower income countries would benefit, the largest gains would accrue to the current poorest performers: South Asia and MENA.

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FIGURE 2: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM GLOBAL GENDER GAPS





A **second** set of arguments in favor of greater gender equality in the labour market relates to the economy of well-being. The macro-level evidence noted earlier that women's education and labour market participation translates into economic growth via the human capital route is supported by a rich body of micro-level literature that women are more likely to use the increased bargaining power that comes with greater access to land, credit, wages, education and cash transfers to promote the health and wellbeing of their family and children (see review in Doepke and Tertilt, 2011). In addition, an ILO publication found that across the world, women's contribution to aggregate household income can make the difference to whether the household is above or below the poverty line, even if that employment is poorly paid (Heintz, 2006). Growth, well-being and poverty reduction are thus more likely to go hand in hand in contexts of greater gender equality.

Thirdly, as Indira Hirway emphasised in her presentation to the workshop, gender equality in the economy and within the home are matters of social justice. Confining women to a limited range of tasks within the domestic domain, which are unpaid and socially undervalued, denying them the opportunity to realise their full potential by expanding the life chances available to them on equal terms with men, is a waste of human talent and diminishes the quality of their lives. Participants at the workshop recognised that not all women may want to participate, or to increase their participation, in the labour market in the light of the barriers they face and their heavy unpaid responsibilities but we can only get a clear view of what their actual preferences are when these barriers are removed and their domestic responsibilities are both reduced and shared more fairly.



In sum, these arguments together hold out the promise of combining gender justice with economic growth and the economy of wellbeing, but they also tell us that while efforts to increase women's labour force participation are important, particularly in regions where they have remained obstinately low, they are only part of the challenge of realising this promise. As the McKinsey report points out, other aspects of the challenge include gender parity in hours worked in the labour force and de-segregation of the occupational structure in order to equalise access to job opportunities. At the same time, the Report recognises that gender parity in the world of work is unlikely to be achieved without parity in unpaid work within the domestic domain. As a result, the Report highlights the importance of policies which reduce the burden of, and redistribute responsibility for, unpaid domestic work along with the policies to close gender gaps in education, financial and digital inclusion, legal protection which it considers to be key drivers for gender parity in the labour market.

There is a growing international commitment to these policies in the global development agenda. The Millennium Development Goals had already recognised the importance of gender equality in access to labour market opportunities as an indicator of MDG3 on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Sustainable Development Goals offer an expanded agenda on gender equality (see Hirway, 2018), one which explicitly includes a commitment to gender equality in access to full and productive employment and decent work (SDG 8.5) as well as to recognise, value and promote shared responsibility for unpaid domestic work (SDG 5.4). The SDGs offer a unified framework for action on fundamental dimensions of poverty and inequality that has been agreed by the nations of the world. While both MENA and South Asia have a longer way to go than other regions in achieving the goal of gender equality in the economy, the evidence that we have cited here suggest that they also have more to gain.



2 Human capabilities and livelihoods: the mismatch in progress

Economic theories have generally predicted that declines in women's fertility accompanied by progress on their health and education would increase their economic capabilities and their participation in the market domain. An influential strand of this literature, cited by Susan Razzaz in her presentation to the workshop, relates to Goldin's thesis about a U-shaped curve in the relationship between levels of development and female labour force participation (Goldin, 1995). According to this, female labour force participation tends to be high in early stages of development, which are generally dominated by agriculture in which women are able to participate, most often as unpaid family labour. As countries begin to industrialise, and production is moved out of the home into factories and firms, women's participation rates start to decline. These are forms of work which are difficult to reconcile with women's domestic duties and often not considered "respectable." Participation rates begin to rise again with rising levels of female education and aspirations, while returns to education rise with the emergence of white-collar service sector jobs considered appropriate for women.

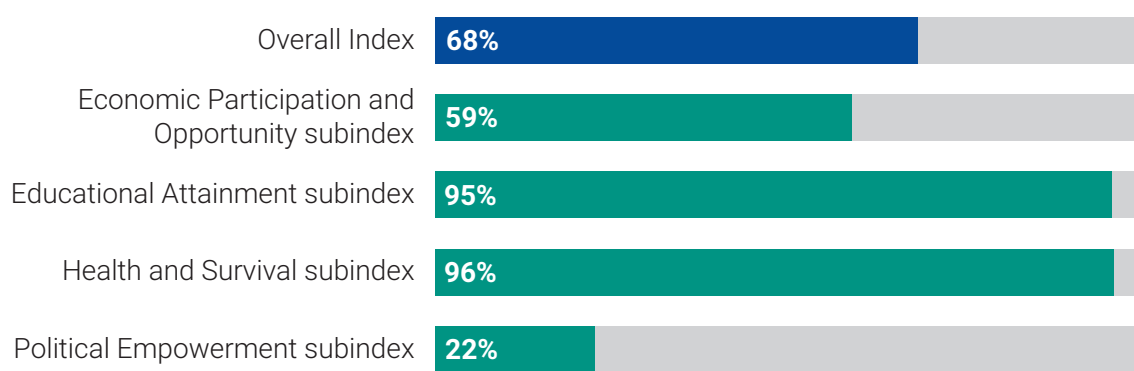
“Economic theories have generally predicted that declines in women's fertility accompanied by progress on their health and education would increase their economic capabilities and their participation in the market domain.”

This thesis does not appear to have been borne out in practice. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2018), for instance, tells us that, at the global level, gender gaps in health and education have been largely eliminated but that progress in the economic domain has been far slower (Figure 3). It is even slower in the political domain.



While the posited relationship between women's education and labour force participation can be found within OECD countries, the picture is more mixed elsewhere. The mismatch is in striking evidence in the South Asia and MENA regions. Table 1 reproduces the country level Gender Gap Index for MENA and South Asia from the 2018 report.

FIGURE 3: GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX IN THE ECONOMY, HEALTH, EDUCATION AND POLITICS



Source: World Economic Forum (2018)

As far as progress on gender equality in education was concerned, the only country from South Asia that was ranked higher than 100 out of 149 countries covered by the report was Sri Lanka, ranked at 90. The rest were ranked between 114 and 123 with the exception of Pakistan which was ranked lowest at 139. Nine MENA countries were ranked above 100 (UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia) with Bahrain and Jordan in the top 50. The rest were ranked between 106 and 117 except Yemen which was ranked at 147.

In terms of progress on gender equality in health, Sri Lanka was the only country from South Asia ranked at 1. The rest were ranked below 100, ranging between 117 for Bangladesh and 147 for India. In MENA region, Syria was ranked at 1, UAE, Turkey, and Oman were all ranked above 100 while the rest ranged between 102 for Jordan and a low of 146 for Yemen. In most of these countries, these reductions in the indexes measuring gender gaps in health and education were accompanied by declines in fertility rates and increases in age of marriage.



TABLE 1: COUNTRY RANKING BY GENDER GAP INDEX IN ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION, EDUCATION AND HEALTH, BY HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX AND BY PER CAPITA GDP: MENA AND SOUTH ASIA

South Asia

	Economic	Education	Health	GDP per capita 2018 (current USD)	HDI (2018 Update)	HDI Ranking
Bangladesh	133	116	117	1,698.3	0.608	136
Sri Lanka	125	90	1	4,102.5	0.770	76
Nepal	110	123	128	1,025.8	0.574	149
India	142	114	147	2,015.6	0.640	130
Pakistan	146	139	145	1,472.9	0.562	150

MENA

Tunisia	135	108	105	3,446.6	0.735	95
UAE	134	95	95	43,004.9	0.863	34
Kuwait	127	74	140	34,244.0	0.803	56
Qatar	139	62	139	69,026.5	0.856	37
Algeria	132	112	137	4,278.9	0.754	85
Turkey	131	106	67	9311.4	0.791	64
Bahrain	128	43	142	24,050.8	0.846	43
Egypt	139	99	84	2,549.1	0.696	115
Morocco	141	117	135	3,237.9	0.667	123
Jordan	144	45	102	4,247.8	0.735	95
Oman*	137	83	49	16,418.9	0.821	48
Lebanon	136	110	122	8,269.8	0.757	80
Saudi Arabia	145	93	136	23,219.1	0.853	39
Iran	143	103	127	5,494.1**	0.798	60
Syria	148	113	1	NA	0.536	155
Yemen	149	147	146	944.4	0.452	178

Source: Gender Gap Index for economic participation, health and education: World Economic Forum (2018).

Source for HDI, HDI Ranking: hdr.undp.org/en/2018-update

Source for GDP per capita: databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators

** not available on WB Database, sourced from ceicdata.com/en/indicator/iran/gdp-per-capita



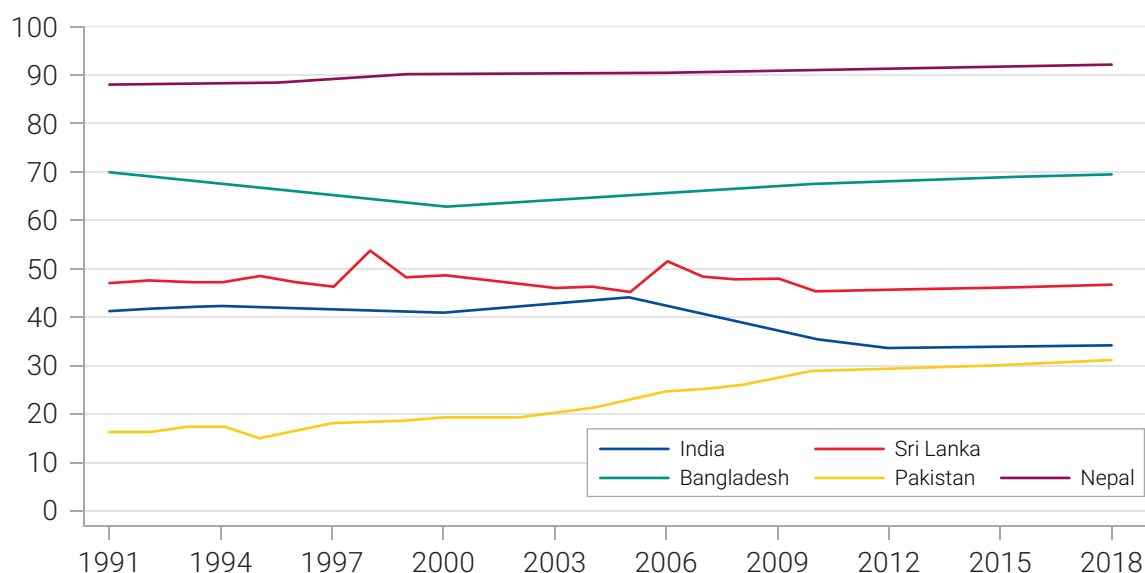
We find less spread among countries in terms of their economic achievements. Nepal, ranked at 110 on indicators of economic achievements, was the best performing country in South Asia; the rest were ranked between 125 for Sri Lanka and 146 for Pakistan. None of the MENA countries were ranked above 125: their rankings ranged from 127 for Kuwait to a low of 149 for Yemen. What has been described as the “MENA paradox” refers to the fact that while most countries in this region performed well in terms of health and education, with some performing extremely well (this is also evident from the Human Development Index ranking in Table 1), they were all generally ranked very low in terms of labour market outcomes, with many of them in the bottom 25 countries.

A different set of insights into regional patterns of gender equality was provided by Kunal Sen in his presentation to the workshop. Echoing the McKinsey Report, he argued that concerns with the promotion of gender equality in the labour market needed to combine a concern with women’s labour force participation (the “quantity” dimension of gender equality) with “quality” of employment. Using ILO data, he showed that progress on the two dimensions did not necessarily move in tandem or in the same direction (Lo Bue and Sen, forthcoming).

Figures 4a and 4b show the ratio of women to men in the labour force in the two regions. In South Asia, Nepal had the highest ratios of women to men in the labour force (90 per cent). The other countries were clustered between 30-40 per cent, with Pakistan reporting the lowest ratio at 30 per cent. These ratios have been rising over time in Bangladesh and Pakistan, stagnated in Sri Lanka but declined in India. The latter finding suggests that India has its own paradox: some of the highest rates of economic growth in the world in recent decades has been accompanied by a decline in female labour force participation rates (Desai and Joshi, 2019). Data for four MENA countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Algeria) showed similar ratios to much of South Asia but again with some variations: ratios were considerably higher in Tunisia and Morocco and lowest in Algeria.

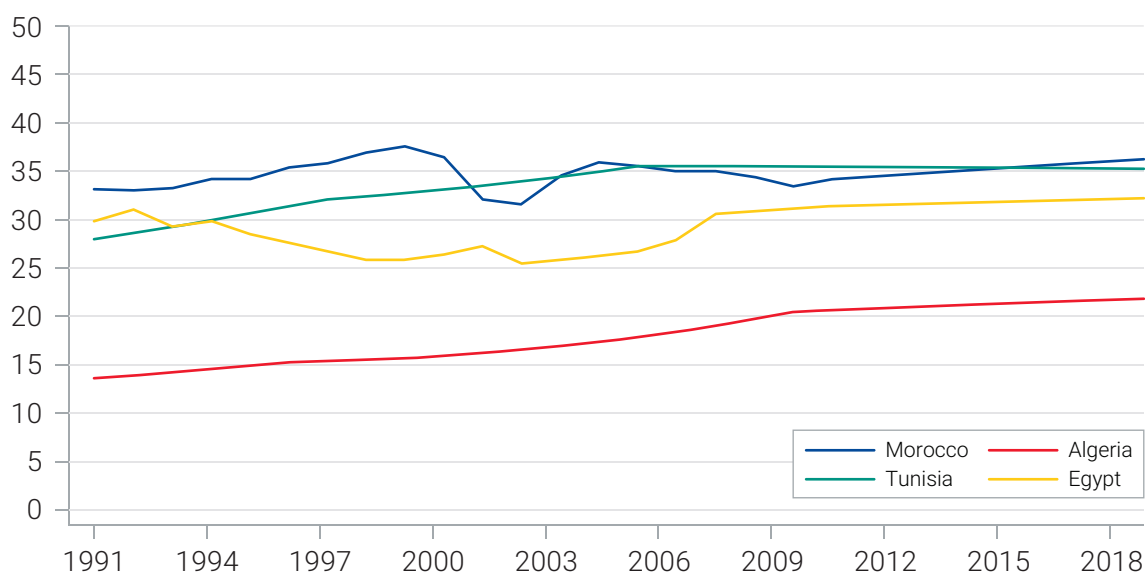


**FIGURE 4a: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE.
FEMALE TO MALE RATIO (%)**



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)

**FIGURE 4b: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE.
FEMALE TO MALE RATIO (%)**



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)



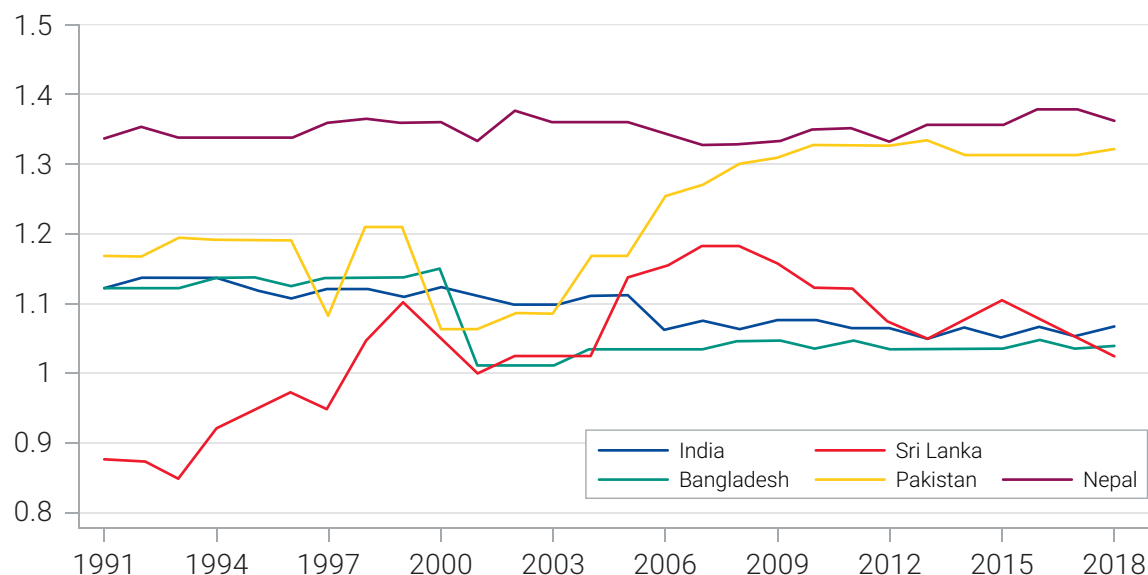
Lo Bue and Sen used the ILO's definition of "vulnerable employment" (*viz.*, own account work and unpaid family labour) as a measure of the "quality" of work and examined female to male ratios in these forms of employment (Figures 5a and 5b). While the ratios in South Asia fluctuated and diverged from each other in earlier periods, by 2018, they were generally clustered around 1 in most countries, with only Pakistan and Nepal reporting somewhat higher ratios. In MENA, the ratio of women to men in vulnerable employment has also varied considerably over time and showed considerable divergence in 2018. Ratios increased steadily in Egypt to its current value of 2.5, the highest of the four countries, while it has decreased steadily in Tunisia which has the currently the lowest ratio at 0.70.

Unpacking the concept of "vulnerable work" for the two regions brought other patterns into view (Figures 6a and b and 7a and b). The 2018 estimates for South Asia show that working women in Nepal were more likely than men to be in "own account work" (ratio of 1.2)⁷, they were far less likely in Pakistan (0.10) and clustered around 0.3 in other countries. The ratio of women to men in "unpaid family labour" varies considerably across South Asia, but it was lowest in India and Pakistan in 2018 and highest in Bangladesh where there were around 5.5 women to every man in unpaid family work. For the MENA countries, the ratio of female to male own account workers was higher in Egypt and Morocco (higher than 0.30) where women participate widely in farm work and animal husbandry but extremely low for Tunisia.

7 It was pointed out that Nepal's LFS includes a time use module which does allow such activities to be captured and may explain the high ratio of female to male labour in "vulnerable" employment.

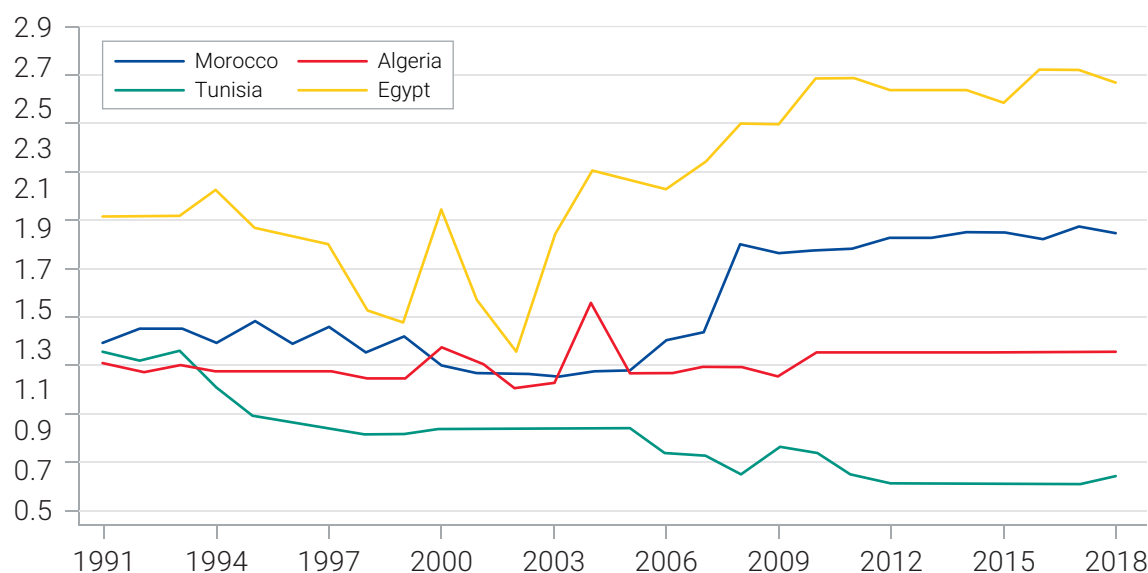


FIGURE 5a: VULNERABLE EMPLOYMENT (SHARE IN TOTAL EMPLOYMENT). FEMALE TO MALE RATIO



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)

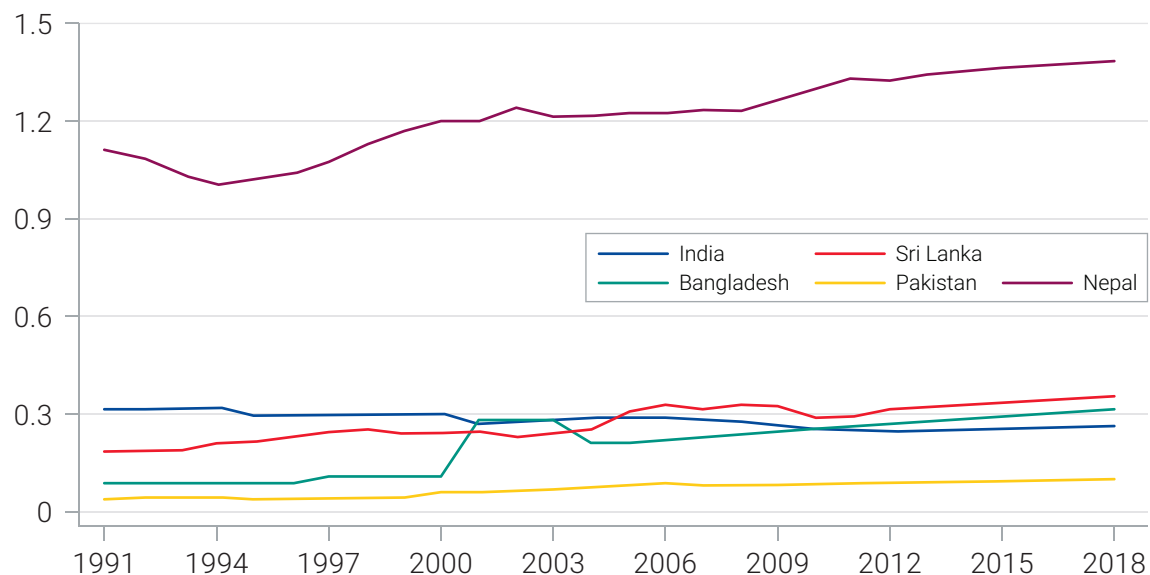
FIGURE 5b: VULNERABLE EMPLOYMENT (SHARE IN TOTAL EMPLOYMENT). FEMALE TO MALE RATIO



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)

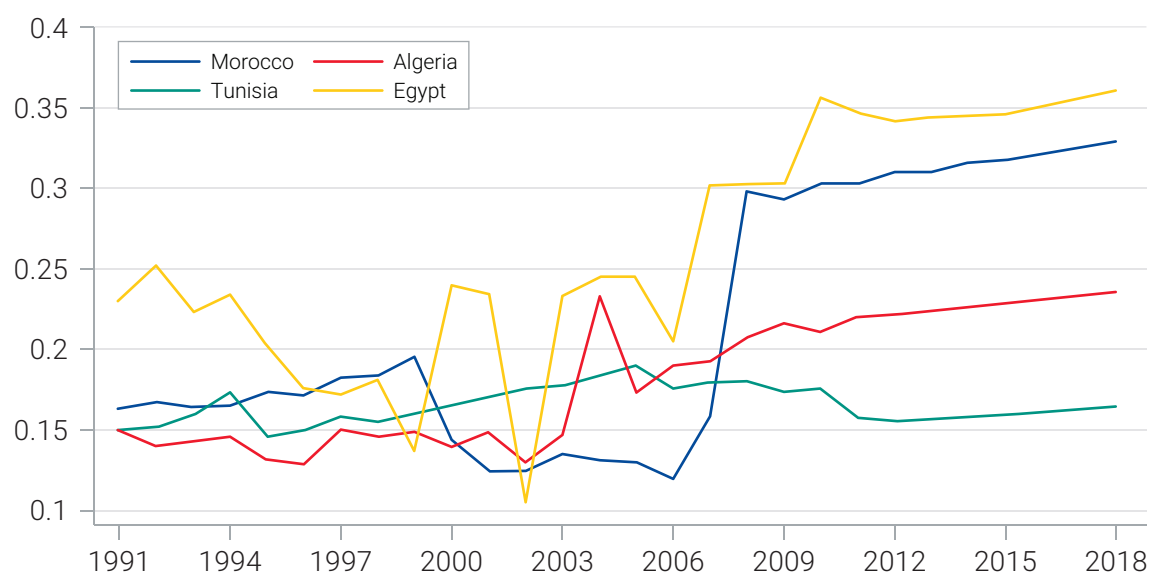


FIGURE 6a: OWN ACCOUNT WORKERS. FEMALE TO MALE RATIO



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)

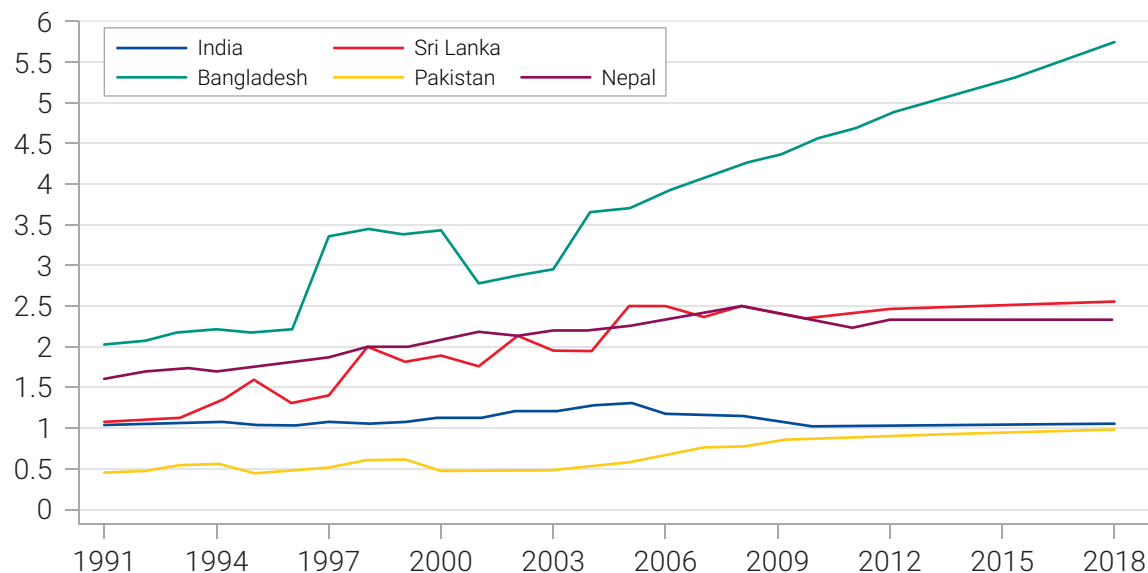
FIGURE 6b: OWN ACCOUNT WORKERS. FEMALE TO MALE RATIO



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)

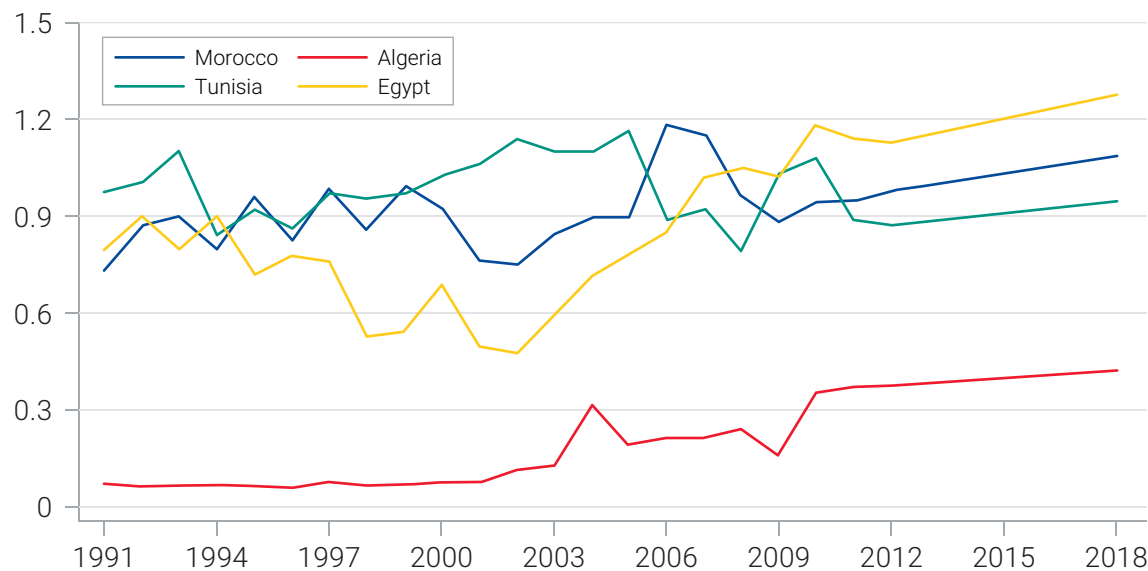


FIGURE 7a: CONTRIBUTING FAMILY WORKERS. FEMALE TO MALE RATIO



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)

FIGURE 7b: CONTRIBUTING FAMILY WORKERS. FEMALE TO MALE RATIO



Source: Lo Bue and Sen (forthcoming)



The regional means for quantity and quality indicators (their average in the last ten years) in these countries gives rise to a typology defined by how women in the different countries fared relative to men in terms of each dimension over time. As Sen points out, the levels and trends in the two dimensions supports a broader argument that the factors that determine the quantity of female labour supplied to the market are not necessarily the same as those which determine the quality of the jobs they find. The intersection of these factors gives rise to some of the puzzles that characterise these regions: countries with high or increasing rates of labour force participation do not necessarily report low or decreasing proportions of working women in “vulnerable” forms of employment while countries with low rates of labour force participation do not necessarily report high proportions of women in “vulnerable” work.

“ A puzzle: countries with high or increasing rates of labour force participation do not necessarily report low or decreasing proportions of working women in “vulnerable” forms of employment while countries with low rates of labour force participation do not necessarily report high proportions of women in “vulnerable” work. ”



3 An inventory of constraints: norms, rules and practices

The broad outlines of the constraints that lead to low rates of female labour force participation in MENA and South Asia were summarised in the introduction. One set of constraints is related to the normative constructions of masculinity and femininity within these regions, which govern the gender division of roles and responsibilities within the domestic domain. These include the gender division of responsibilities for breadwinning and care/housework, restrictions on women's mobility in the public domain to family honor, patriarchal structures of authority within the household, and patrilineal inheritance practices which give rise to stark inequalities in the distribution of land and property. A second set of constraints related to the broader public domain, to policies and laws that discriminate against women and girls and to the gender segregated structure of labour markets. These constraints were discussed in greater contextual detail during the workshop.

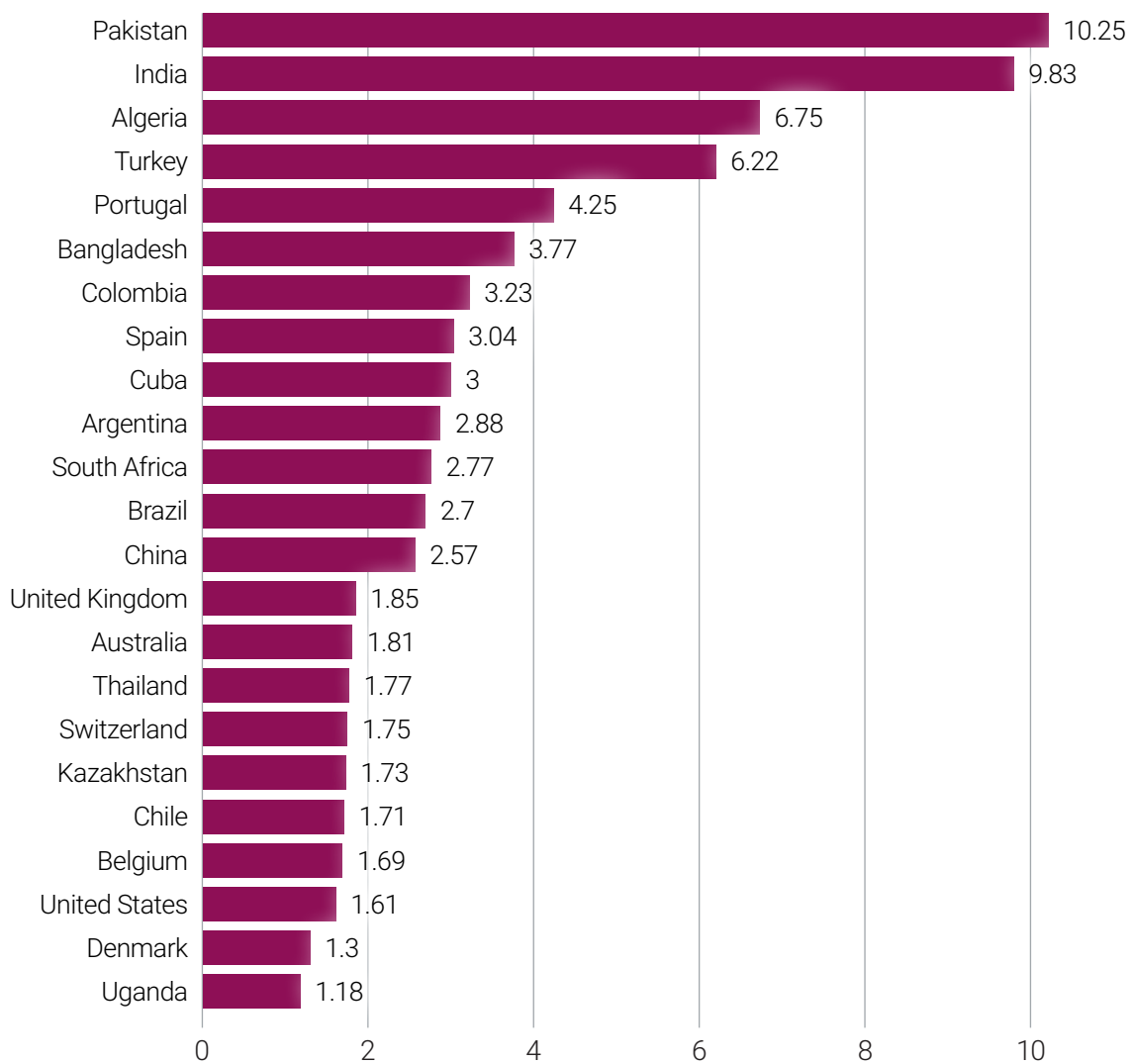
3.1 Household work and care responsibilities

The norms governing the gender division of labour, which assign primary responsibility for unpaid domestic work to women within the family, is widely recognised as a key factor behind lower rates of female labour force participation relative to male found in much of the world.



FIGURE 8: FEMALE TO MALE RATIO IN TIME DEVOTED TO UNPAID CARE WORK (2014)

Unpaid care work refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, household and voluntary community work.



Source: Taken from Deshpande and Kabeer (2019)

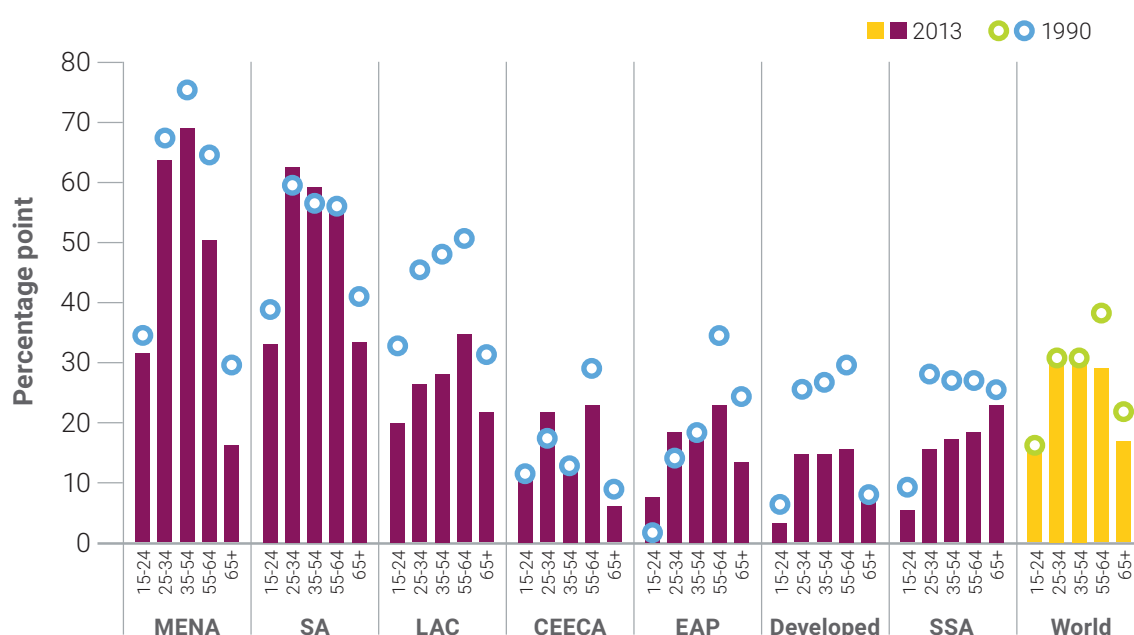
While these norms are not unique to “classic patriarchy”, Ashwini Deshpande drew attention to OECD data on the ratio of female to male time in unpaid domestic chores in 23 countries (Figure 8) which found that it was *highest* in all five countries from the two regions that were included in the analysis (Deshpande and Kabeer, 2019). It was highest for Pakistan and India (10.25 and 9.83 respectively) followed by Algeria and Turkey (6.25 and 6.22) and Bangladesh (3.77). At the other end of



the spectrum, the lowest ratios were reported by Uganda and Denmark (1.2 and 1.3). The “outlier” status of South Asia is also highlighted in a study comparing the UK and India (Afridi *et al.*, 2019). It concluded that the near-complete absence of men’s contribution to domestic labour in India compared to the UK was an important factor in explaining why women’s labour force participation in the former context remained low, regardless of their level of education.

While this marked asymmetry in the gender division of unpaid work clearly contributes to the overall gender gap in labour force participation rates in the two regions, its impact is not uniform either within the two regions or across them. First of all, there are variations across women’s life course. In both regions, marriage appeared to constitute the key turning point at which women dropped out of the labour force. In this, they differed from other regions where motherhood is more frequently the turning point. One result of this was that the gender gap in labour force participation rates in the adult years (25-64) are much larger in the two regions than the rest of the world (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: AGE-SPECIFIC GENDER GAPS IN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES



Source: UN Women (2015)



Secondly, the impact of marriage on women's labour force participation varied between the regions. Based on the analysis of 28 Muslim countries, many of which belonged to the South Asia and MENA regions, Niels Spierings (2014; 2015) suggested a distinction between countries where married women were expected to stay at home because they were responsible for all aspects of household work along with their care responsibilities (more likely to be in the MENA regions) and those where married women were expected to stay at home primarily because of their responsibilities for care (more likely in South Asia).

This distinction led to variations in the extent to which household composition affected women's ability to take up paid work outside the home. The presence of other adult women in the household who could potentially share household responsibilities had little impact on women's labour force participation in the MENA countries in his sample, but in Bangladesh (along with Malaysia and Indonesia), the presence of more than one adult woman in the household increased the likelihood of women's employment. The impact of older household members also seemed to vary for these reasons. They had little impact on women's labour force participation in the MENA region but were elsewhere associated with a higher likelihood of paid employment among young women. And finally, the presence of young children decreased the likelihood of women's employment across the 28 countries, but the presence of older children was only found to have an impact in the MENA countries.

A further nuance on the relationship between women's labour force participation, marital status and household composition was provided by Mahdi Majbouri (2018). He found that, although only a very small percentage of married women were in the labour force in the MENA countries, the participation rates of these women did not appear to be affected by household composition, either by numbers of children or by the presence of extended family members. This finding applied equally to more and less educated women. This suggested that married women who managed to overcome the various obstacles to their participation in the work force demonstrated an exceptionally strong attachment to



the labour force. What was not yet clear was whether this attachment reflected similar motivations or whether it reflected “need” on the part of less educated women and “preference” on the part of the more educated.

“ In South Asia as well, married women generally report lower rates of labour force participation than other categories of women, with widowed/divorced women generally reporting the highest. ”

Hendy (2018) used time allocation data from Egypt to illustrate the consequences of married women's primary responsibility for all aspects of household work for the hours worked by those in employment. Women's unpaid work burdens rose substantially at marriage and remained high, regardless of employment status: they devoted between 1 and 3 more hours a day to housework than unmarried women and 2 to 10 more hours a day to care. They also worked longer hours than men, once their hours in paid and unpaid work were combined. Not surprisingly, with the exception of married women who managed to get public sector employment, the rest were mainly found in unpaid family labour (see also Nazier and Ramadan, 2018). We discuss later why the public sector was able to retain married women.

In South Asia as well, married women generally report lower rates of labour force participation than other categories of women, with widowed/divorced women generally reporting the highest. Research from Bangladesh and West Bengal found that marriage was associated with the reduced likelihood of work outside the home and the greater likelihood of subsistence production within the home (Heintz *et al.*, 2017; Deshpande and Kabeer, 2019). In addition, in both contexts, primary responsibility for domestic chores was a greater constraint than primary responsibility for child care on women's ability to undertake paid work outside the home. In her presentation, Deshpande drew attention to the role of domestic technologies in easing women's work load in the West Bengal context: increasing possession of labour-saving domestic appliances (refrigerator, mixer, gas, washing machine and pressure cooker) directly reduced the likelihood of women's responsibility for domestic chores.



3.2 Norms of female seclusion

While some version of a public/private gender divide exists in many parts of the world, it is far more strictly enforced under conditions of classic patriarchy. Norms of gender propriety seek to restrict women's mobility in the public domain, linking female seclusion to family status and male honour, and imposing sanctions on those who seek to depart from this norm. This reinforces the constraints posed by women's domestic responsibilities on their ability to work outside the home.

For women who choose, or are forced, to work outside the home, gender norms delineate which forms of outside work are considered socially acceptable and which considered disreputable. By and large, formal wage/salaried employment, particularly in the public sector, is considered the most respectable form of employment (chiming with Goldin's thesis about white collar office jobs noted earlier), and generally preferred by women themselves, for reasons discussed below.

Casual agricultural wage labour is widely regarded as among the most poorly paid of wage labour opportunities for men as well as women, but for women it is also a disreputable form of work since it has to be carried out in the open fields, plantations or construction sites. Such work is rare for women in MENA, but in the South Asia context, where there are high levels of landlessness, it tends to be carried out by men and women with few assets, skills or education. This, in turn, gives rise to socio-economic variations in women's labour force participation within the South Asian context, with educated women who opt to work more likely to be found in formal employment while those at the other end of the income distribution are forced to work in unpaid agricultural wage labour.



In India, where caste correlates with landholding, it is generally men and women from the lowest castes who are concentrated in this form of work. They combine long hours of poorly paid, irregularly available, extremely demanding but socially despised income-earning activities with their unpaid domestic responsibilities. These women are likely to be working longer hours than men, but unlike the working women discussed in Hendy's study who are likely to be in formal public sector employment, the time poverty of women in agricultural wage labour in India translates into nutritional deficits (Box 1).

Box 1: Time poverty and nutritional deficits

WHO research on the effort-intensity of different domestic tasks, such as washing clothes and scrubbing, finds that it is far greater than many forms of paid work such as public sector office jobs. Yet because it is unpaid and taken for granted, it is breadwinning members who work outside the home who get a disproportionate share of household food and nutrition. This contributes to the high rates of female undernourishment found in rural areas of India. Rao and Raju (2019) carried out time use and diet surveys with 60 tribal and poorer caste households in rural Maharashtra and Odisha. It found that women did 56 per cent of total work of the household: 75-80 per cent of the work in planting and harvesting and 95 per cent of domestic and care work. The time deficits for care were more intensive for women from landless and marginal households, with a 30 per cent decline during planting and harvesting seasons. With reduced consumption but more intensive activity, women experienced greater seasonal weight loss - around (3-4 per cent) of body weight – than men.



3.3 Formalised discrimination: legislation and policy

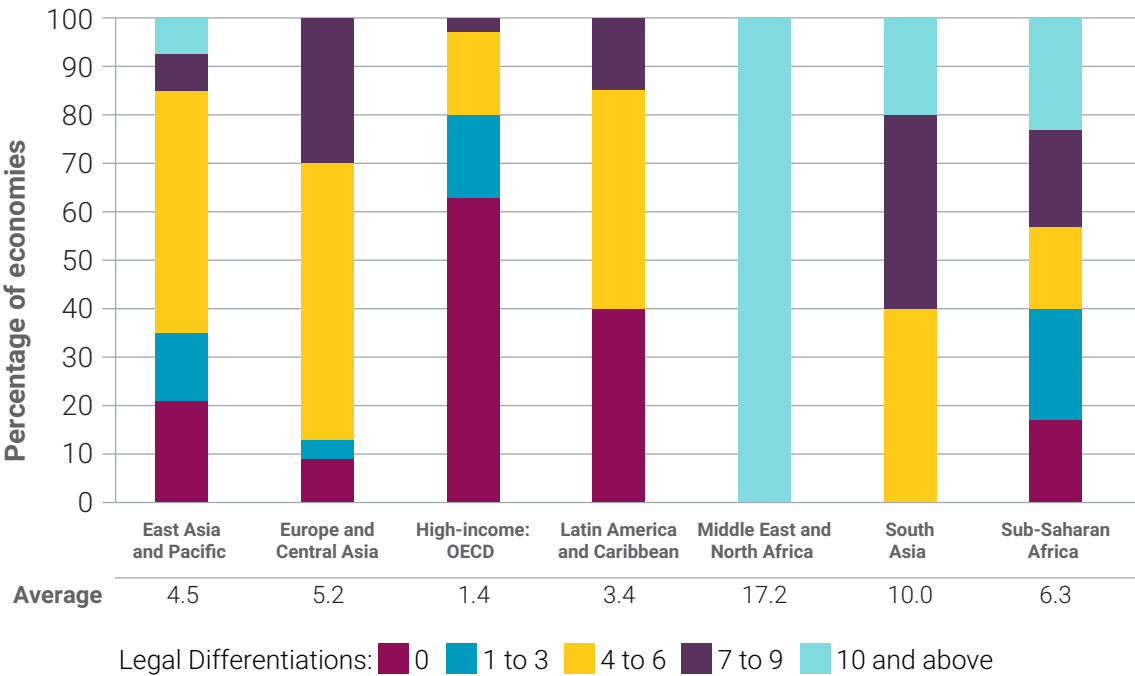
The role of the state in reinforcing informal norms and practices that discriminate against women can be seen from the series of reports published by the World Bank and the International Financial Corporation since 2010 which document the extent of legally sanctioned gender inequalities in countries across the world. The reports focus on legal restrictions in six domains relevant to women's economic opportunities: accessing institutions; ownership, control and management of property; getting a job; incentives to work (including tax incentives and child care support); access to credit; and going to court.

The 2012 Report covered 141 countries (Figure 10). High income OECD countries reported the lowest regional average of legal restrictions, with just 1.4 laws that differentiated opportunities by gender. The MENA region reported the highest regional average with 17.2 laws. South Asia was next with a regional average of 10 legal differentiations. Each of the 14 countries included in the MENA estimates had at least one legal differentiation relating to accessing institutions and using property. Only Sri Lanka in South Asia did not have any legal differentiations on the two topics. 26 of the countries included in the survey differentiated between men and women in inheritance rights. This included all 14 economies included from MENA as well as three from South Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal).

The 2019 report noted improvements in the legal treatment of women in every region of the world and a rise in the global score. High income OECD countries continued to score highest although SSA reported the highest numbers of legal changes with 71 reforms. MENA and South Asia continued to lag behind. They had the fewest reforms (19 and 18 respectively) although six South Asian countries introduced laws on work place harassment.



FIGURE 10: LEGAL DIFFERENTIATIONS PER REGION



Note: The averages are the average number of legal differentiations per region.
Source: Women, Business and the Law database.

Source: World Bank/IFC (2012))

Examples of gender unequal laws also surfaced during the workshop discussion. Susan Joeques gave the example of legal prescriptions on women’s working hours and their prohibition from certain occupations deemed “morally hazardous”: in Tunisia, for instance, women were forbidden by statute from working with metals (World Bank/IFC, 2013). Sanchari Roy noted that women in India are prohibited by law from working long hours and night shifts. Research has shown that when the 1991 liberalisation reduced output tariff protections, large private firms responded by increasing the number of shifts per worker, leading to a decline in the relative share of female employment (Gupta, 2011).

In Turkey, where agriculture is largely made up of small-scale farming, the legal system between 1926 and 2015 denied women the right to inherit landholdings below a certain scale. This accounted for 35 per cent of total agricultural holdings in the country. As Ece Kocabicak



noted, one of the consequences of these inheritance laws was that men who owned land were given official recognition as farmers even though they relied heavily on the unpaid family labour of women and children to work on the farms (Kocabicak, 2018).

The removal of legal discrimination in Turkey is still too recent to establish whether women will begin to claim land rights or whether religious/cultural values will over-ride legal entitlement but the analysis offered by Dina Najjar *et al.* with regard to Egypt is not encouraging (Najjar *et al.*, 2018). In the New Lands, land distribution quotas targeted specifically for women has enabled a select group of women to acquire significant economic, social and political power but they remained hesitant or unwilling to enable their daughters to inherit land at par with their sons: the law had changed but norms had not. Their conclusion echoed a theme that surfaced several times during the workshop: gender equity goals can only be partially accomplished through legal measures and economic interventions: they have to be accompanied by efforts to change social norms and attitudes.

3.4 Shifts and variations in cultural norms and institutional constraints

One of the concerns that surfaced frequently during the workshop related to the tendency in the literature to explain the women's low rates of labour force participation in the two regions in terms of an ahistorical understanding of "culture" as fixed and static, impervious to change. This tendency was particularly strong in relation to Muslim-majority countries, given widespread constructions of Islam as a monolithic institution. While acknowledging the significance of cultural norms and practices, participants felt it was also important to highlight substantial differences within each region as well as evidence of change over time, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.



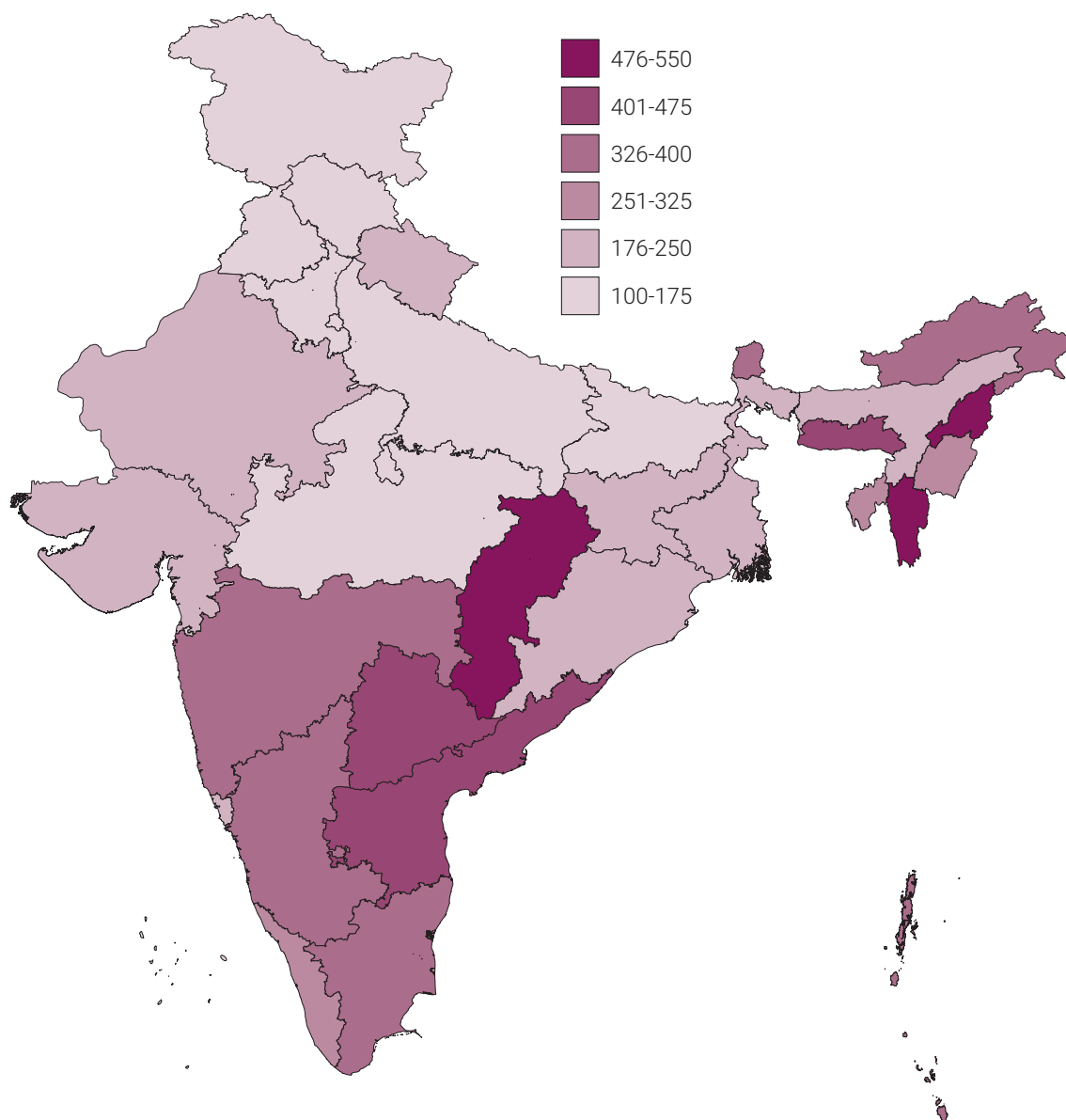
One very obvious source of variations across the region related to their per capita GDP. Many of the MENA countries had large oil reserves and were considerably wealthier than those in the region without oil as well as South Asian countries generally (Table 1). These variations in resource endowments had important implications for the strength of gender norms and the possibilities for women to participate in the labour market: these norms are less affordable for the poor in poorer countries.

The other point to note is that countries characterised by “classic patriarchy” show considerable internal variation in the degree to which its norms and practices are adhered to. In the Indian context, for instance, there is marked divide between its northern and southern states, with women enjoying far greater public mobility in its southern states compared to its northern ones and reporting far higher rates of labour force participation (see Figure 11).

Even within Bangladesh, a far smaller country, Kabeer *et al.* (2013a) reported that the practice of “veiling”, expressions of son preference and adherence to “traditional” gender norms varied considerably across the eight districts included in their survey. They found that the most conservative district in terms of these three indicators also reported the lowest female participation rates outside the home. Survey-based analysis work by Ragui Assaad and Hania Sholkamy noted that women in Upper Egypt, one of its poorest and most socially conservative regions, were less mobile, more likely to express son preference, less likely to report feeling a sense of control over their own lives – and less likely to be in the labour force than women from other regions (Kabeer *et al.*, 2013b).



**FIGURE 11: FEMALE WORKER TO POPULATION RATIO (PER 1,000)
BY REGION (INDIA)**



Source: Constructed by Sanchari Roy from Indian Labour Bureau: Report on Employment-unemployment survey 2015



Spierings's presentation suggested that both state action and cultural norms help to explain variations in women's involvement in non-agricultural employment in Muslim-majority countries. States which had institutionalised "public seclusion norms" report lower levels of female employment than others: the institutionalisation measure was a composite index made up of state adoption of Sharia law, legal restrictions on women's access to economic property, other than land or bank loans, and legal restrictions on women's freedom of movement in public domain. Strength of adherence to cultural norms also made a difference: women's primary education was less likely to translate into non-agricultural employment in more "traditionalist" areas where traditionalism was measured by an index made up of household size, polygynous households, age differential between women and their partners and age of women at the birth of first child.

In terms of changing norms and practices over time, workshop participants noted the decline in the "masculine" sex ratios that characterised populations in these regions. These ratios were an indicator of strong son preference combined with extreme forms of discrimination against women and girls, leading to excess levels of female mortality in different age groups, the phenomenon of "missing women" (Sen, 1992). The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 shows that all the countries from the MENA regions and most of the countries in South Asia now reported "normal" sex ratios at birth. The only exception was India which was ranked 147 out of 149 countries in terms of the health index. Here son preference remains strong and female-selective abortion used to reconcile son preference with the desire for fewer children (Klasen and Wink, 2002).

Kabeer *et al.* (2013a) carried out research in Bangladesh to explore the factors behind the decline in son preference that appears to explain the decline in discrimination against daughters. They found that education was one of the most important predictors of changing preferences, but



that while primary education was the significant factor for older women, who had grown up at a time when female education rates were very low, among younger women who had grown up at a time when female education was becoming widespread, it was women with post-primary education who reported the weakest son preference. As noted, son preference remained strongest in the more traditional districts.

The presentation by Lopita Huq suggested that gender norms in Bangladesh appeared to be in a state of flux. She cited a recent survey of rural households that found that: 90 per cent men and women said that they believed that both husband and wife should work for income; the same proportions believed that women's full-time outside job had negative consequences on family and children" and nearly two thirds believed that a full time job gave women independence and made her and her family happier (Mahmud and Mustafa, 2016). The role of media, of television and mobile phones, while apparently empowering for women (Kabeer *et al.*, 2018), was also a site of contestation. As Huq pointed out, women learnt about their rights from the media, television, but it was also a medium for virulent diatribes against women in the name of religion.

Jackie Wahba offered examples of changes in norms and behavior associated with return migration in Jordan. Households with migrants who had returned from Gulf countries were more likely to subscribe to traditional versions of norms relating to the role of women, freedom of mobility and household decision-making compared to households without such migrant (Tuccio and Wahba, 2018). They also reported different behavioural outcomes in employment, fertility and education. She also found that destinations mattered: those who had been to more conservative Arab countries were more likely to hold conservative views. Another study (Tuccio *et al.*, 2019) set in Morocco, found that return migrants from Western European countries tended to express more progressive social and political attitudes – although not necessarily in relation to gender – than those returning from Arab countries.



4 Measurement issues

Given the workshop focus on regions where female labour force participation rates appears to be low and resistant to change, questions were raised with regard to measurement and the extent to which accepted definitions of the labour force captured the nature of the work that women did. It appeared that official efforts at measurement were more successful in capturing women's work when it resembled that of men: outside market-oriented activity. They were least successful in capturing forms of work that were primarily women's responsibility: market-oriented or subsistence activities carried out on an informal basis within or near the home.

Participants gave examples of how efforts to capture the full range of women's activities gave rise to very different estimates of their labour force participation rates to the official ones:

- In Bangladesh, a survey that used exactly the same ILO definition of the labour force as used by the Bureau of Statistics but addressed the questions to women and spent more time per woman, found an estimate of women's LFPR of 67 per cent compared to official estimates of 30 per cent (Mahmud and Tasneem, 2011). Much of the expansion occurred in women's home-based activity. Only 10 per cent were involved in outside paid work. More detailed analysis suggested this activity largely consisted of livestock and poultry rearing for the market (48 per cent) rather than expenditure saving (15 per cent).



- In West Bengal, Deshpande and Kabeer (2019) added a component to their survey specifically for women who had stated that they “did not work”. This contained questions about a series of “extra-domestic duties” which the Indian NSS classifies as labour force activities⁸. They came up with an estimate of 52 per cent for West Bengal compared to the NSS estimate of 16 per cent. Again, much of this was in home-based work, but unlike Bangladesh, it was expenditure-saving rather than market oriented.
- In rural Pakistan, Haris Gazdar and colleagues found that by re-estimating official labour data over last 15 years, using the largely underutilised module of the LF survey intended to capture the more elusive aspects of SNA activity, rural women’s labour force participation increased from 39 per cent to 52 per cent (Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women 2018). Contrary to official claims that women’s labour force participation had risen from 22 per cent to 39 per cent, it appeared that women had long made up more than half the agricultural labour force (ibid).
- In Egypt, Assaad noted that major efforts were made to improve the measurement of women in unpaid family work in agriculture and animal husbandry starting in 2007. However, despite these efforts, detailed surveys of women’s activities show that labour force participation statistics continue to understate rural women’s economic activities by about 50 per cent (Keo, Krafft and Fedi, 2019).

⁸ A category in the Indian labour force data which refers to activities such as collecting water and firewood and unpaid family labour.



Various reasons were put forward for the persistent failure to capture the full range of women's economic activities. One was the fact that surveys were addressed to the household head, most often male who were more likely to under-report women's economic activities, especially if it raises questions about his breadwinning role. In addition, many of these activities were under-reported by women themselves because they were regarded as part of their domestic responsibilities, rather than constituting "work" (Desai and Joshi, 2019). Based on detailed analysis of different data sets, Sonalde Desai suggested that the official data gathering efforts in India may simply not have caught up with changes in the nature of women's work in rural areas, particularly its increasing fragmentation. Her study suggests that the decline in women's work in rural areas may not be as dramatic as suggested by official statistics.

While there is considerable evidence that male household heads frequently under-report women's engagement in paid work, Sanchari Roy and her colleagues reported on a less widely researched aspect of the gender division of labour at household level: men's contribution to unpaid domestic work within the home (Box 2).

Box 2: Do men over-report their contribution to unpaid domestic work?

While the under-reporting of women's contribution to market work by men as well as women has received considerable attention in the literature, there has been less attention to how men and women report men's contribution to unpaid household work. This was discussed by Sanchari Roy, based on a survey she carried out with her colleagues Farzana Afridi and Amrita Dhillon, on women working in small-scale or home-based manufacturing in Delhi and their husbands. They found that husbands gave far higher estimates of their contributions to unpaid domestic responsibilities than did their wives. For instance, while 57 per cent of husbands reported spending more than 4 hours a week helping their wives with household duties, only 7 per cent of the wives reported this estimate. And while only 12 per cent of husbands said that they did not provide any help to their wives, nearly 33 per cent of their wives reported that they did not receive any help from their husbands. The workshop discussion suggested that these conflicting reports may lie in how men and women interpreted the concept of "helping" and what they meant by "work".



While much of the discussion on informational gaps related to the kinds of questions included in surveys on work, there was some discussion of specific categories of workers who are deliberately or unintentionally overlooked in official statistics. Haya al-Dajani's research drew attention to refugee women in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, many of whom had lived in these countries for several years, but whose entrepreneurial activity was not counted in labour force statistics because of their migrant status. Lopita Haq pointed to paid domestic workers as another category who tended to be overlooked in the Bangladesh labour force statistics despite the fact that this was a significant occupation for women from lower-income households.

“*Haya al-Dajani's research drew attention to refugee women in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, many of whom had lived in these countries for several years, but whose entrepreneurial activity was not counted in labour force statistics because of their migrant status.*”



5 Women's employment preferences: the “demand” for work

As Sonalde Desai pointed out, a great deal of the economic literature on women's labour market behavior focuses on supply side constraints and interprets labour market outcomes as a form of “revealed preference”, work that women choose to do, given their constraints. This form of analysis fails to directly investigate their own preferences. Sen's discussion of the ILO's concept of “vulnerable employment” provides a useful first step in distinguishing between high and low-quality jobs but it does not capture the question of “quality” from the perspective of women themselves, the nuanced considerations that might influence women from different social groups in different contexts in their labour market decisions.

These are likely to reflect, among other things, the household's economic position and the need for women's earnings, local cultural norms about gender propriety, gendered constraints on women's labour market options and the range of alternatives available to them. Given the strength of norms about the gender propriety of different labour market options, women's concerns with “quality” of work are likely to incorporate their views about the perceived propriety of a job. Consequently, along with the “reservation” wage in determining their willingness to take up a particular job, they are also likely to have minimum “reservation conditions” reflecting these concerns (Dougherty, 2014). Different dimensions of quality can set up trade-offs for women – and for their families since these decisions are not taken in isolation.



5.1 Unpaid family labour

Unpaid family labour, one of the categories defined by the ILO as “vulnerable work”, has the advantage that it is the form of work most easily reconciled with women’s socially ascribed domestic responsibilities and norms of female seclusion. It may, for this reason, be a preferred option for many women. This should not detract from the fact that it does not provide them with access to earnings of their own, provides little scope for expanding their social networks and does not appear to promote their voice and agency. For instance, a synthesis of findings from surveys of working and non-working women in Egypt, Ghana and Bangladesh, which used a common set of indicators of women’s empowerment, found that formal employment was more consistently associated with indicators of empowerment in all three contexts than work within the home or economic inactivity (Kabeer *et al.*, 2013b).

5.2 Own account work and entrepreneurship

The second category in ILO’s definition of vulnerable work is “own account” work, but here we come up against the problem of considerable heterogeneity within the category. As the literature on entrepreneurship shows, own account work can encompass registered as well as unregistered “micro-enterprises”, with or without employees, carried out within the home, in a fixed location outside the home or on a mobile basis. Returns can vary according to level of technology and working capital.

“Unpaid family labour, one of the categories defined by the ILO as “vulnerable work”, has the advantage that it is the form of work most easily reconciled with women’s socially ascribed domestic responsibilities and norms of female seclusion.”



There is a strong assumption in the literature on entrepreneurship that such work, as with unpaid family labour, is likely to be preferred by women because of its compatibility with their domestic responsibilities, flexibility of hours and, in cultures of female seclusion, the added attraction of compliance with social norms. However, while it is the case that “non-agricultural self-employment” accounts for a higher percentage of women’s labour force participation than that of men in most regions of the world (UN Women, 2015), the exceptions appear to be South Asia and MENA. According to UN Women figures, such employment accounts for a higher percentage of the male labour force than female in South Asia (22 per cent and 14 per cent). Data for Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey suggest that there too, men are more likely to be employers/self-employed than women (26 -27 per cent versus 11-12 per cent) in all three settings.

In other words, it appears that women in the two regions not only face more severe constraints in taking up own account activities than men within their regions but they also face more severe constraints relative to women in most other regions. It may be that they face exacerbated versions of the constraints faced by women in other regions in terms of access to finance, social networks and relevant skills but our discussion earlier suggests that they also face more severe cultural constraints and legal discrimination. This seems to be borne out by Ozcan’s research (Box 3).

**Box 3: Attitudinal determinants of women's entrepreneurship**

The importance of broader social environment was suggested by Berkay Ozcan's presentation to the workshop. He examined the determinants of entrepreneurial activity across 13 countries in the MENA region between 2009 and 2013, including broader cultural attitudes to entrepreneurship (an index measuring attitudes to autonomy and innovation) and attitudes to gender and entrepreneurship (an index measuring social acceptability and opportunities). In terms of cultural attitudes, he found that the autonomy index was associated with a reduction in the gender gap among those owning a business. As far as gender-related attitudes were concerned, he found that the social acceptability index was the most significant driver of his results. So, while broad support for entrepreneurship in a country appeared to have an overall positive effect on rates of entrepreneurship, it had little impact on the gender gap in entrepreneurship. On the other hand, positive gender attitudes had varying effects on the decision to enter entrepreneurship, but they did reduce the gender gap among entrepreneurs. He suggested that this might be related to the fact that countries with a high gender index were also more developed economically and equipped with stronger labor markets. This lessened the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur but increased the likelihood of ownership status conditional on involvement in business activities

The general constraints that women face in the labour market by virtue of their gender means that it cannot be assumed that all women engaged in own-account work out of choice. Many are there because of the absence of alternatives. This speaks to a distinction in the enterprise literature between necessity-driven entrepreneurs, oriented to survival and family welfare and profit-oriented entrepreneurs responding to opportunity. This literature suggests that women tended to be over-represented at the survival end because of the constrained nature of their options. In the case of the refugee women who featured in research by Al-Dajani and Marlow, they faced the additional constraints associated with uncertain citizenship status (Box 4).

**Box 4: Longevity without growth: refugee women's enterprises in MENA countries**

As Al-Dajani pointed out, four of the top ten refugee host countries are in the MENA region. Their study focused on refugee women who had been displaced to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey from Syria, Palestine and Iraq (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2019). These women lived in residential areas rather than refugee camps (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). They were mainly Muslim, had completed school education, were married with children and currently employed husbands. They ran informal microenterprises within feminised sectors of the economy, catering almost entirely to the refugee community. Their enterprises contributed to the family's standard of living, were "sustainable" in the sense of being long-running but largely characterised by zero growth. Nor did it seem likely, given their marginalised situation, that their enterprises would grow in the future.

The various motivations that bring women into entrepreneurial activity and the combination of "objective" and "subjective" considerations that influence their preferences determine where they are positioned on the necessity versus opportunity continuum and distinguish "high" from "low" quality entrepreneurial activity. Such distinctions are important for understanding why women take up entrepreneurial activity, whether they are able or committed to growing their enterprises and whether they might be better served through the provision of alternative forms of employment. Even at the survival end of the enterprise continuum, small differences in the terms on which women engage in entrepreneurial activity can make a difference to their experiences and preferences and determine whether they will continue in their present activity, should other options emerge (Box 5).

**Box 5: From direct to intermediary traders**

Barsoum's on-going research into the gendered impact of government's policy ban on fishing in Lake Quaroun in Egypt provides an example of how women's preferences might differ between apparently similar forms of own account work because of differences in the terms involved. As she notes, women in this community "have always worked". Men in the family would go out to fish through the night, while the women undertook to sell the fish in local markets. When the ban on fishing took place, men found other work opportunities, some migrating elsewhere to do their own fishing or to work as wage labour for other fishermen. Women also needed to earn money but had limited options. They remained within the fish trade but shifted from direct trading of fish caught by family members to intermediary trading, buying farmed fish from merchants to sell in local markets. Unlike the previous arrangements in which male family labour supplied the fish and the entire proceeds from the sale of the fish represented family income, the new arrangements meant that they either had to sell enough fish each time they went to the market to cover what they paid the wholesalers or end the day with negative returns.

5.3 Wage employment

Like own account work, the category of wage labour is also very heterogeneous. It can be formal, informal or semi-formal; regular or irregular; piece rate, paid in kind or in wages; casual or permanent. While it is not classified by the ILO as "vulnerable employment", some of it may very well belong in this category, depending on the predictability of returns and the conditions under which it is carried out.



“Public sector jobs offer greater security and social benefits than other forms of waged work, are covered by protective legislation and generally allow women to work with other women in feminised social sectors of the bureaucracy.”

We have already noted that formal service jobs, preferably in the public sector, are regarded across the two regions as the most socially acceptable forms of work for women, but that it is limited to women with the necessary educational qualifications. Public sector jobs offer greater security and social benefits than other forms of waged work, are covered by protective legislation and generally allow women to work with other women in feminised social sectors of the bureaucracy.

There is a considerable difference between the two regions in the ability of women to find such work. Countries in the MENA region with large oil reserves/remittances have been characterised by larger public sectors than other developing countries (World Bank, 2013). They have been an important source of socially respectable employment for educated women in the region. Public sector employment accounts for 52 per cent of the female labour force in Egypt and just 24 per cent of male. South Asia on the other hand has much smaller public sector, competition for these jobs is intense and men generally dominate: the public sector accounts for around 10 per cent of male employment and just 5 per cent of female.

There was detailed discussion among participants from the MENA region as to some of the reasons for women's presence in – as well as preference for – public sector employment. Their presence partly reflected the size of the sector but in Egypt, women's presence in public sector was additionally the result of public policy. The state, till very recently, guaranteed public sector employment for men and women with higher educational or vocational training credentials (Assaad, 1997). Across the region, public sector employment carried a range of social benefits which had positive implications for women: substantial maternity leave, shorter working hours, job security, gender equality in wages in different grades and greater tolerance for sick leave. Moreover, the availability of these jobs at the local level meant that women did



not have to travel very far to take them up. These factors combined to explain why marriage did not interrupt women's employment in the public sector.

Preference for public sector employment was combined with a strong aversion to private wage employment, particularly in the informal sector. While women working in the public sector continued to work in it till retirement, those in private sector dropped out of the labour force just before or when they got married. The factors here included much higher levels of gender inequality in private sector wages, lack of job security and social benefits and longer working days.

In addition, the absence of a rule-based culture that regulated behaviour between men and women, between employers and employees, made these private sector establishments distinctly inhospitable for women. Qualitative research in Egypt by Barsoum *et al.* (2009) draws attention to abusive behaviour by employers, use of insults, lack of respect for their qualifications, requiring female employees to carry out demeaning and menial tasks, often unrelated to their job description, penalties for lateness or absence from work; long hours at work as well as long hours of commuting time and finally, the experience, as well as the constant fear, of sexual harassment. The fact that these are often small-scale firms and workshops, hidden from public view, with few other employees adds to the reputational risk faced by women who work in these establishments: concerns that these forms of work could compromise a women's reputation within her community.

Similar concerns about working in small private firms were reported in a survey carried out in Jordan, cited by Susan Razzaz. 44 per cent of those interviewed said that they believed that working women were exposing themselves to harassment of various kind while 84 per cent were of the view that only families with low financial status were likely to report working women within the family. The majority of men said that it was acceptable for women to go out to work as long as they were home by 5 pm. At stake here were concerns with both the safety and reputation of women in their family as well as their own status as guardians of women's honour.



However, one finding that had emerged from the research in West Bengal and Bangladesh is that when women express a preference for public sector jobs, they were not necessarily talking only in terms of full-time salaried employment. Many government jobs are outreach jobs in health, education, child development and other services with which women are associated. These are not necessarily well-paid nor do they offer long term security but because they involve some form of public service on behalf of the government, they attract less community censure. They may offer an acceptable pathway into the public domain for women (see Khan, 2011 for similar findings relating to Pakistan and Hoodfar, 2010 for Iran).

While casual wage labour appeared to be the least desirable form of work in both contexts, it was more widespread in South Asia. As Deshpande *et al.* (2018) show, gender disparities in wages in India are much higher at the lower end of the wage distribution (the “sticky floor” phenomenon) than at the higher end (‘the glass ceiling’) as is the case in OECD countries. There is no question of social security or legal protection in these kinds of jobs.

Studies of agricultural wage workers in Morocco (Najjar *et al.*, 2018b) and Bangladesh (Kabeer *et al.*, forthcoming) attested to the exhausting and unstable nature of the work, the low wages received and harsh conditions of employment. Around 38 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men in the Moroccan study said they had no preferences with regard to the various tasks assigned to them because they saw the work merely as an option of last resort. In both contexts, women faced additional disadvantages. Men tended to be assigned higher-paid, equipment-intensive tasks while women performed lower-paid, time-intensive tasks. In Morocco, women were paid a “female wage, set lower than the male wage, even when they performed the same tasks”. In Bangladesh as well, women were paid lower wages than men; their wages were often set at a fixed rate, regardless of task, while male wages varied by season and task.



In both contexts, women spoke of reputational and sexual risk. The Moroccan study reported that women who did agricultural wage work kept their faces covered while working to conceal their identity in order not to jeopardise their chances of marriage: families did not want to marry their sons to women who did work that was associated with immoral behaviour. The research from Bangladesh suggested that both the experience of sexual harassment, particularly by women casual wage workers, and even more widespread, the fear of it, was a major factor in curtailing women's mobility in the public domain and hence the kinds of economic activities they would consider taking up.

5.4 Structures of family authority and women's work

While women's "preferences" are shaped by the multiple and overlapping constraints which determine the options available to them, their decisions are not made in isolation but in the context of patriarchal households in which the "preferences" of dominant members, be it husbands, parents or in-laws, may play an important, even overriding role, in what women are able to do.

The Bangladesh research found that the views of husbands and mothers-in-law were cited by some of the women interviewed, not only to explain why they were in home-based work, but also their restriction to unpaid family labour activities (working on family farm or in husband's enterprises) although they themselves would have preferred a form of home-based work that gave them an independent income, such as livestock rearing and tailoring (Kabeer *et al.*, forthcoming).



The survey by Sanchari Roy and her colleagues (cited in Box 2) found that husbands and wives had very different views as to the constraints that mattered in limiting women's ability to take up paid work. These views varied between 8-12 percentage points for some constraints:

- 68 per cent of men, and 60 per cent of women, believed that the dearth of jobs, as well as the dearth of "suitable" jobs, were important constraints to women taking up paid work.
- 64 per cent of men believed that low remuneration was a constraint compared to 72 per cent of women.
- 49 per cent of men believed that gaining permission from their families was a major constraint for women compared to 62 per cent of women;

However, gender differences in views were considerably larger in relation to women's unpaid responsibilities:

- 62 per cent of men believed that child care was a constraint compared to 86 per cent of women (a difference of 24 percentage points).
- 34 per cent of men believed that women's domestic responsibilities were a constraint compared to 69 per cent of women (a difference of 35 percentage points).

The study of agricultural workers in rural Morocco found contextual variations in the restrictions faced by women in taking up agricultural wage work (Najjar *et al.*, 2018b). In the poorer, subsistence-oriented family farming region, both male and female workers singled out permission from husbands, the sex-segregated nature of the work and proximity to home as the most important considerations in determining socially acceptable agricultural work for women. In a more dynamic agricultural region, where cash cropping on larger farms was widespread, there were fewer concerns about women working in mixed groups or on farms that were some distance from their homes – although even here, husbands preferred their wives to work for employers who were known to them.



Najjar suggests that these varying responses could be interpreted in a number of ways. One is that the greater availability of wage opportunities in the more dynamic area increased the opportunity costs of keeping women in the home. The other is that the exercise of social controls over women in the poorer region served to protect available opportunities for men in a context where such opportunities were limited. Some of the poorer women in this area, most often widowed, divorced and deserted women, complained that only men were given access to wage employment in this region; many had to migrate to communities where agricultural work was more acceptable and available for women.

“Some of the poorer women in this area, most often widowed, divorced and deserted women, complained that only men were given access to wage employment in this region; many had to migrate to communities where agricultural work was more acceptable and available for women.”



6 The structure of opportunities and employer preferences: the demand for female labour

The other side of the coin to women's preferences for particular forms of economic activity is employers' demand for particular categories of female labour. The patterns of economic growth promoted within an economy that determine the overall demand for labour also generated occupational structures that differentiate this demand by the skills, education, experience, location and, of course, gender of workers. This played out in different ways in the two regions.

6.1 The MENA region

Despite rapidly rising rates of female education across much of the MENA region along with rising age of marriage and declining fertility rates, it has been characterised by low, stagnant and more recently, declining rate of female labour force participation and rising levels of female unemployment: the MENA paradox. As Assaad pointed out, these recent trends reflect the changing structure of opportunities in the region and with it, changes in the gendered nature of demand for labour. Oil and oil remittances in countries of the region helped finance a large public sector, but also led to uneven growth in the private sector. Dutch Disease biases against traded goods and services was associated with rapid growth in largely male-dominated segments of the private sector, such as real estate, construction and transportation, while undermining the competitiveness of traded sectors, including those more hospitable to female labour, such as agriculture and light manufacturing.



Declines in women's labour force participation rates, and rising levels of unemployment among educated women, began with cutbacks in the public sector. While male workers could turn to the private sector for jobs, women's employment prospects have deteriorated. Very few sought, nor could find, jobs in the private sector where gender wages were not only larger but had begun to increase. Furthermore, while public sector jobs had been available locally, the constraints on women's geographical mobility emerged as a major gender-specific constraint in the search for private sector opportunities. Men could travel longer distances in search of work, but women, particularly those with higher education either dropped out of the labour force or joined the ranks of the unemployed (Arntz and Assaad, 2005; Assaad, Hendy, Lassassi and Yassin, 2018).

Susan Joekes pointed out that Morocco and Tunisia were somewhat different from the countries described by Assaad in that they did not have oil reserves or very high levels of remittances nor could they fund large public sectors. Women were absent from wage employment in much of the urban economy,⁹ including the faster growing sectors, such as aeronautics and automobiles, both enclave activities dominated by men. As a result, female unemployment rates were considerably higher than those of men.

Although these countries did not have the problems of Dutch Disease discussed by Assaad, their industries suffered from the "sclerotic" structures that arise in the rentier states that characterised much of the region: oligopolistic concentration of economic ownership, an aversion to innovation and challenge and barriers to the incorporation of new categories of entrepreneurs or labour. The "sclerotic" character of these economies was evident in three firm-level indicators: business owners and managers were much older in this region than elsewhere (World Bank, 2009); entrepreneurship rates in MENA were very low relative to other countries with similar GDPs (Ayman *et al.*, 2017); and there was a "missing middle" in the distribution of firm size, suggesting that small,

9 As Najjar's contribution had pointed out, they worked mainly as unpaid family labour in the rural economy.



start-up ventures rarely grew into medium sized firms (Aly *et al.*, 2017). In addition, close interconnections between the economic and political elites meant serious collusion between firms, barriers to entry into major segments of the labour market and the absence of competition across much of the economy so that their profits margins are guaranteed (Rijkers, Freund and Nucifora, 2014).

The only exception to this overall picture of a male-dominated industrial labour force were the export-oriented garment industries. While standard explanations relating to women's "nimble fingers", their innate suitability for these jobs, and the lower wages that allow a labour intensive industry to compete in the international markets apply here in these countries as well, Joeke's suggested the explanation for the preference for a female labour force must also be sought in the opening up of this section of the economy to new ideas and influences. Access to new markets in Europe meant that industrialists in this sector did not have to face barriers put up by incumbent firms in domestic markets nor did they have to compete with them in order to make a profit. In addition, these firms were linked into global value chains. This meant that representatives of global brands and buyers were present on the ground building local capacity, providing technical assistance and setting quality standards. And finally, the extent of foreign direct investment in this sector in Morocco, and to an even greater extent, Tunisia meant that managers in this sector were not bound by local patriarchal norms to the extent that prevailed elsewhere in the economy.

A somewhat different story about the demand side of the labour market was provided by Susan Razzaz in relation to the Jordanian economy (Razzaz, 2017). She distinguished between the general demand for labour, the general demand for Jordanian labour and the specific demand for female labour. She noted women's education had increased in Jordan, as in the rest of the MENA region and was in fact higher than men's in younger cohorts. There was also a sizeable service sector. However (contrary to Goldin's thesis), women's participation rates were extremely low, lower than most other countries in the MENA region and while unemployment was high for men, it was even higher for women.



The main explanation for these high rates of unemployment was the highly elastic supply of migrant labour into the country. Migrant labour has continued to increase as a share of employment in Jordan, while unemployment rates among Jordanians, both male and female, have continued to increase. Migrant workers can be paid a lower minimum wage, can be paid less than local labour, and this wage gap between migrant and local labour has been increasing. The expected returns to rising levels of education among Jordanians have therefore not materialised.

The ready supply of cheaper migrant labour also means that although there are some high-technology jobs in the economy, there is little generalised incentive to invest in new productive technologies. The organisation of much of private sector production is along traditional, labour-intensive lines in small and old firms, similar to those described by Joeques. As a result, Jordan ranks very low in terms of growth in labour productivity: around the bottom 13 of 123 countries.

Both Kocabicak and Najjar stressed the important role of agriculture as a source of employment for female labour across MENA and South Asia. They also noted the increasing “feminisation” of the sector evident in many of these countries as men left agriculture in search of work elsewhere. In Morocco, for instance, Najjar noted that female employment in agriculture had increased from 29 per cent in 1980 to 47.7 per cent in 2010, while male employment in agriculture decreased considerably from 66 to 55 per cent. Kocabicak pointed out that according to 2017 data, agriculture accounted for 73 per cent of female labour in Pakistan, 57 per cent in Morocco, 57 per cent in India, 39 per cent in Egypt, 62 per cent in Bangladesh and 35 per cent in Turkey (WDI, 2019)¹⁰

“Migrant workers can be paid a lower minimum wage, can be paid less than local labour, and this wage gap between migrant and local labour has been increasing.”

10 WDI (2019) “World Development Indicators” (Accessed: 27 June 2018).



Najjar's work in Morocco discussed the impact of technological change on the gender composition of the demand for labour in agriculture. Where the Moroccan government's efforts to promote cash crops through the privatisation of land and irrigation subsidies had proved successful, it had given rise to large-scale commercial farms and a dramatic growth in agricultural wage employment for both men and women – although, as noted earlier, with considerable gender segregation of activities. Where farming remained small-scale and dependent on rain-fed subsistence agriculture, the female labour force was largely made up of unpaid family labour. Recurring droughts and the loss of common pasture land had increased landlessness in these areas but while men were either able to find wage employment within their locations or migrate out to more productive areas, women were largely confined to family farming.

6.2 South Asia

Selim Raihan discussed gendered labour markets in Bangladesh. He pointed out that there had been a small decline in male labour force participation rates since 1998 (4 percentage points) and a considerable rise in female labour force participation rates (13 percentage points). There have been both positive factors behind the rise in female labour force participation (declining fertility rates, rising levels of education and the emergence of new opportunities) as well as push factors associated with poverty.

As in the rest of South Asia, formal public sector employment in Bangladesh is largely monopolised by men. New opportunities for women have taken a number of different forms. First, there has been the emergence of an export garment manufacturing industry with a strong preference for female labour, preferably with women with some minimum level of education. Women's response to these opportunities, with many thousands of women migrating on their own into the cities in response to the opportunity to earn higher and more regular wages



(compared to the casual, poorly paid and less preferred forms of work available to them in the countryside) helped to challenge the prevailing view of a culturally-determined inelasticity of female labour.

At the same time, a substantial part of the increase in female labour force participation has been in home-based employment, most often in livestock and poultry rearing, opportunities enabled by the widespread availability of microfinance programmes targeted to women. One reason why female economic activity was so much lower in West Bengal than Bangladesh was that the greater availability of microfinance enabled greater opportunity for home-based market-oriented activity in Bangladesh (Heintz *et al.*, 2017).

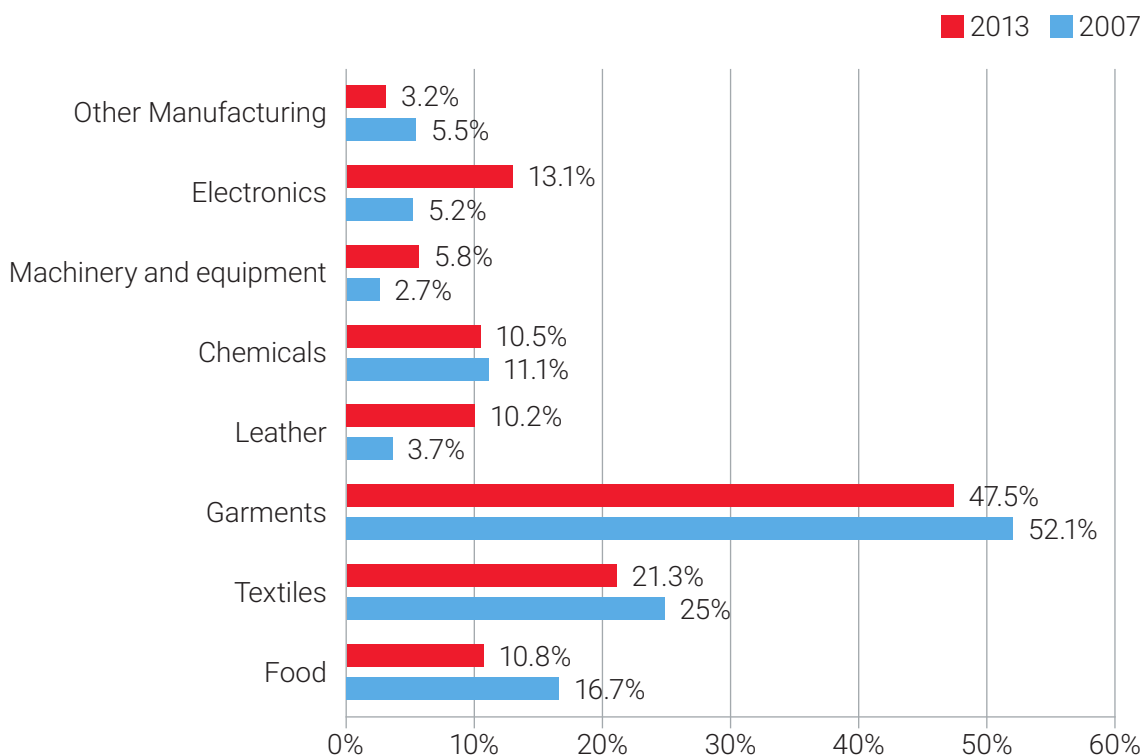
However, Raihan pointed out that the increasing “quantity” of female employment has been accompanied in recent years by a decline in “quality”: between 2013 and 2017, female manufacturing jobs fell by 0.93 million; more than 85 per cent of jobs during this period for women were informal; and women are making up an increasing proportion of the agricultural work force. Analysis by Raihan and Haque (2018) of the World Bank’s Enterprise Survey confirms this overall picture (Figure 12): it found that female employment intensity declined most in major manufacturing and services sectors - from 52 per cent in 2007 to 48 per cent in 2013.

The survey also provided some insights into the shifting demand for male and female labour. It found that six out of nine innovations discussed in the survey had a negative and statistically significant impact on the intensity of female employment. Automation in the export garment sector, in particular, had been associated with a steady decline in women’s share of the labour force.

“ One reason why female economic activity was so much lower in West Bengal than Bangladesh was that the greater availability of microfinance enabled greater opportunity for home-based market-oriented activity in Bangladesh (Heintz *et al.*, 2017). ”



**FIGURE 12: PERCENTAGE SHARE OF FEMALE WORKERS BY
MANUFACTURING SECTOR IN BANGLADESH (2007 AND 2013)**



Source: Raihan and Haque (2018)

Industry stakeholders identified a number of factors behind this decline – and behind a general reluctance to hire women workers. One related to the lack of relevant skills, reflecting a mismatch between formal educational qualifications and marketable technical skills, further aggravated by the greater lack of relevant vocational training among women. Other factors included conservative norms and practices (female seclusion, early age at marriage), women's domestic responsibilities, particularly juxtaposed with long working hours and overtime requirements, concerns about social and work place safety, lack of transport facilities and the dearth of women-friendly technology. It was also evident that managers tended to discriminate in favour of men in managerial positions.

Finally, a number of contributions focused on the changing demand for female labour within the Indian context. As noted earlier, female labour force participation rates, already low by international standards, have declined further in recent decades so that they are now under 30 per cent,



among the lowest in South Asia. Explanations for the earlier stagnation in rates encompassed some of the gender specific constraints discussed earlier but there has been fresh debate about explanations for the recent decline, particularly in the light of India's high rates of growth.

The workshop discussion noted a number of "stylised facts" about women's labour force participation in India. First of all, while women's LFPRs have traditionally been higher in rural areas than in urban, the recent decline is largely concentrated in rural areas where their rates have gone from 48 per cent to 23 per cent from 2004-5 to 2017-7. It also occurred mainly among less educated women, those who have traditionally had higher participation rates. Urban rates have largely stayed the same.

Sen presented findings from a research project in India that made use of different definitions of work to demonstrate both how they yield different estimates of the rural female labour force participation but also what they reveal about the shifting relationship between the quantity and quality of work available to women in the course of the recent decline in female labour force participation rates recorded for India (Dubey *et al.*, forthcoming; see also Dubey *et al.*, 2017). The definitions used varied from narrow to wide:

- the **narrow** definition was confined to salaried, waged and casual wage labour.
- the **medium** definition included salaried, waged and casual wage labour plus own account workers and employers, including in agriculture (waged and self-employment).
- the **wide** definition included salaried, waged and casual wage labour, own account and employers, including in agriculture, and added the NSS category of "extra-domestic duties".

The study found that the decline in female labour force participation rates between 1983 and 2012 was far larger for the narrow and medium definition of work than for the wide definition. In other words, much of the decline related to women's direct engagement in market activity. There had been less of a decline in their subsistence and indirect activities.



Decomposition analysis to explore the contribution of different factors to declines in these different definitions of labour force participation found that higher levels of education explained 40 per cent of the decline in the narrow definition but 100 per cent of the decline in the wide definition. Married women's labour force participation had gone up over time according to the wide definition as they took on a greater burden of extra-domestic duties. Dalit and Adivasi women, along with women from poorer households, were less likely to participate in the labour force, narrowly defined, but were more likely to participate, given the wide definition.

Their conclusion was that India's high rates of economic growth had been accompanied by a decline in both the quantity as well as the quality of women's work. Not only has there been a decline in women's participation in forms of work that are likely to be socially recognised, but women who face constraints of marital status, caste or household income are now more likely to be found in forms of work that do not generate an income and are counted in national statistics. The fact that married women are taking on greater responsibility for extra-domestic, unpaid work suggests that the gender distribution of such work within the household has become more unequal over time.

Kanika Mahajan focused on the impact of increasing mechanisation in the agricultural sector as a possible factor in the declining demand for female labour. She distinguished between labour-substituting technologies and techniques (power tillers, primary tilling and secondary tilling, thresh and chaff cutter and combine harvesters) and labour augmenting ones (pesticide sprayer, pump-set and other irrigation). There has been a considerable rise in the use of tractors in rural areas as a result of government subsidies since 2000.

She constructed a mechanisation index made up of the most important of the labour substituting technologies. Drawing on survey data, she found that mechanisation had a negative but small and insignificant effect on the number of male days in cultivation (-0.0354) while it had large, negative and statistically significant effect on female days (-0.113**). She noted that while ploughing was largely a male activity,



the idea that the impact of tractors was confined to displacing male labour in ploughing was misleading for a number of reasons: first of all, tractors was widely used for transportation, including the transport of construction materials, generating a demand for male labour; secondly, because tractors include related attachments for sowing, fertilisation and harvesting, demand for labour in these tasks could also be potentially affected; and thirdly, deep tillage can reduce the need for weeding labour – an operation widely performed by women across the world.

6.3 Women's education and employment: the disconnect between supply and demand

Given the strong thesis about women's education and participation in the labour market, particular attention was paid to this theme at the workshop. As several participants pointed out, the rising levels of open unemployment among educated women in the MENA region, and also more recently in South Asia, were indicative of the disconnect between jobs considered suitable for educated women and those available to them.

However, there were some important differences in the relationship between female education and employment in the two regions. Assaad pointed out that with the possible exception of Turkey, the relationship was positive in MENA countries. Those without education were most likely to be in forms of work, primarily in agriculture, that were not part of the measured labour force. Women's employment rose with education, but it rose particularly sharply at the upper secondary level.

This pattern has been changing in recent times, giving rise to the so-called MENA paradox: women's education in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan has continued to rise rapidly, leading to reduction, if not reversal, in the gender gap but there has been no commensurate rise in female labour force participation. Participation among educated women, those with secondary education or above, now displays a clear downward trend. This is less obvious in Tunisia, primarily because the unemployment component of participation has increased. As noted



earlier, these reflect the contraction of public sector employment, which is the primary employer of educated women. This contraction was most pronounced in Egypt and Tunisia and least pronounced in Algeria, which continues to use its hydrocarbon rents to support a major role for the state in the economy.

Across South Asia, on the other hand, there has long been a U-shape in the relationship between women's education and labour force participation: high levels of labour force participation among women with little or no education, a decline as education levels rise and then a rise at higher, generally tertiary, levels of education. Earlier explanations had interpreted this as a supply side phenomenon. Women with little or no education were more likely to come from poorer households and were forced to earn a living, since they had no safety nets to fall back on. Those with moderate levels of education were likely to withdraw from the labour to signal their higher status and, in India, to emulate upper caste adherence to norms of female seclusion. With further rise in their education levels, and the likelihood of finding better paid jobs, the opportunity costs of staying at home appeared to outweigh its benefits and many more were likely to take up work.

More recently, demand factors have been brought into the explanation. While the argument remains that those with little education must take whatever work they can find, there is an added focus on the fact that women with moderate levels of education are unable to find jobs suited to their educational qualifications, given the slow growth of white-collar jobs suitable for women (Klasen and Pieters, 2015; Neff, Sen, and Kling, 2012). It is only the small minority of women with higher education who are likely to find socially acceptable formal service sector employment.

In addition, studies from India also suggest evidence of a "latent demand" for work, or "disguised unemployment", among women classified as outside the labour force. Roy cited National Sample Survey data which showed that among women classified as being out-of-labour-force, nearly a third reported that they would like to work. This rose to over half among highly educated women in rural areas (Pande, 2017).



Deshpande and Kabeer (2019) found that 70 per cent of the women in their West Bengal survey, who were classified as outside the labour force, expressed a willingness to take up paid work if it was made available closer to their homes. Around 19 per cent expressed a preference for full time, regular work while 67 per cent preferred occasional full-time work, 8 per cent preferred regular part-time work and 6 per cent wanted occasional part time work. As they concluded, “not working” was less a matter of “choice” and more a matter of constraints imposed by domestic responsibilities. The unmet demand for work was higher among widowed/divorced women who needed some form of income. It was also higher among women with moderate levels of education, precisely the group that have dropped out of the labour force in recent decades.

However, one important finding from India that emerged from Sen’s presentation is that while women’s education had a curvilinear relationship with the “quantity” dimension of labour force participation, the relationship between education and “quality” of work was linear and unambiguous: better-off and more educated women were more likely to be found in higher quality work – and less likely to be unpaid family workers. In Bangladesh too, women’s education was associated with greater likelihood of off-farm employment, including employment in formal employment (Heintz *et al.*, 2017).

“ *The unmet demand for work was higher among widowed/divorced women who needed some form of income. It was also higher among women with moderate levels of education, precisely the group that have dropped out of the labour force in recent decades.* ”



7 Expanding and improving women's economic opportunities: lessons, recommendations and challenges

7.1 Transformative and incremental pathways to change

In the light of the challenges involved in expanding and improving women's economic opportunities in the two regions under discussion, Spierings made a useful distinction between “transformative” agendas and “pragmatic” approaches to policy change. A transformative agenda takes the longer-term view: it seeks to address power relations within different contexts, in this case, taking patriarchal power as a central focus. It sets out to destabilise long-established gender inequalities in roles, responsibilities and resources and their intersection with other forms of inequality. Pragmatic approaches, on the other hand, are based on a more incremental view of change. They entail “small and concrete steps” in the right direction, setting achievable goals that might simultaneously help to weaken entrenched forms of patriarchal resistance as a precondition for attempting more transformative change.

At the same time, given variations across countries and over time, and given also differences in their policy regimes, development trajectories and evolution of civil society, participants acknowledged that, while countries categorised as “classic patriarchy” might share a common long-term vision about gender justice in the economy, their understanding of the boundaries between transformative policies and the “pragmatic politics of the possible” might differ considerably. So the



starting point for exploring either approaches was the recognition that in both regions, many women wanted some form of paid work, many others needed to earn an income, but they faced varying constraints, including constraints in the broader political environment, in their ability to do so. The policy challenge was finding ways to creating the gender-parity in the economy along the lines argued, for instance, by the McKinsey Report. The policy responses discussed ranged from market-generated jobs to jobs created by the public sector to efforts by civil society and addressed both the quantity and quality of employment.

7.2 The macro-policy environment

A number of the recommendations discussed at the workshop related to the broader policy environment. They argued that while employment-centred macro-economic policies were necessary to expand and diversify economic opportunities for all, additional measures had to be taken to ensure that women gained a fair share of these opportunities. These could combine policy support for traditionally female-intensive sectors, which were frequently neglected in past policy efforts, with greater attention to the potential for female employment in emerging sectors where customary patriarchal norms had not had a chance to take root.

Agriculture was the sector traditionally most associated with female employment and was becoming more feminised over time. Despite the fact that women did a disproportionate amount of work in agriculture, often as unpaid family labour, men remain the main beneficiaries of policies relating to land, extension services and technology. The evidence on agricultural employment from India had attested to the negative impact of mechanisation on women's wage employment opportunities. In Morocco, on the other hand, state promotion of privatisation and support for commercial agriculture had successfully generated new wage employment opportunities but women had not been able to take advantage of more mechanised and higher-skilled jobs. In both cases, there needs to be attention to building women's skills and resources so that they do not lose out in these processes.



Examples of this are discussed below along with examples of efforts to gain greater recognition and rights for women in the agricultural sector.

A broader point related to broadening women's employment options outside agriculture. As Ece Kocibicak argued, there was a need to move away from policies premised on the idea of a rural -urban dichotomy towards policies that recognised the reality of an increasingly rural-urban continuum. Joekes pointed out that one of the lessons from the history of development in Taiwan was the policy decision adopted in the early stages of industrialisation to promote non-agricultural sectors in rural areas so as to deepen rural markets.

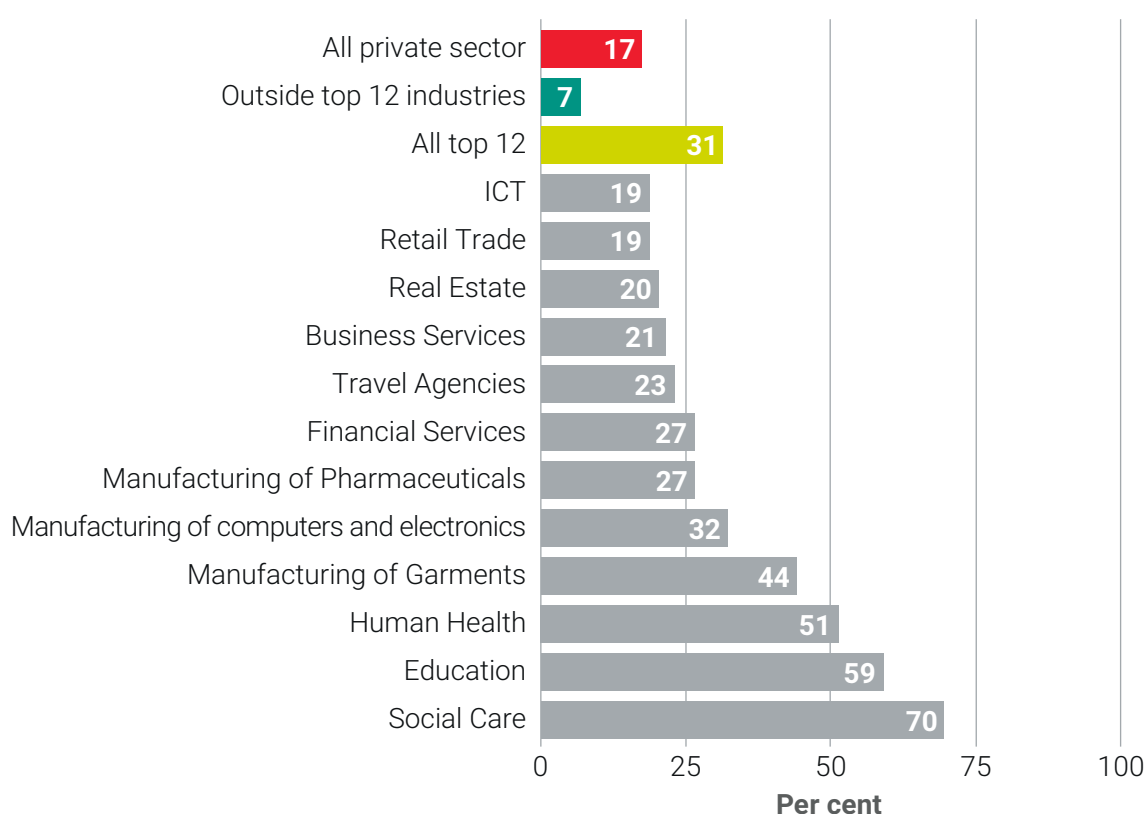
The potential for female employment in sectors outside agriculture varied across countries.

Assaad provided estimates of female intensiveness of private sector industries in Egypt: it was highest in the "care economy" sectors of health, education and elderly and child care services, where women made up nearly three quarters of the workforce (Figure 13). Investment in this area would clearly benefit women and is discussed in the next section. The next highest female intensive industries were three manufacturing sectors, namely garments, pharmaceuticals and electronics assembly. Growth in these sectors had been constrained by the Dutch Disease phenomenon and overvalued exchange rates. The recent floatation in the Egyptian pound in late 2016 and its resultant devaluation were likely to result in a revival of these sectors. There was also potential for growing female employment in other export-oriented sectors such as agribusiness and horticulture, and tradable services, such as those related to the outsourcing of customer services and other back-office administrative functions. Greater openness and integration into global markets and more realistic exchange rate policies would be necessary to promote these newer sectors.



Raihan's account of the changing distribution of female labour within the manufacturing sector in Bangladesh between 2007 and 2013 highlighted the female-intensiveness in different sectors in this context (Figure 10). Here, female intensity was highest in export garments and textiles but had decreased by 2013. However, it has been rising in electronics, machinery and equipment, chemicals and leather industries, areas into which the government is seeking to diversify. While there are questions about the terms on which women are incorporated into these sectors, the "quality" dimension of employment, these estimates nevertheless speak to the potential of generating more and better jobs for women in these sectors.

FIGURE 13: PROPORTION OF FEMALE WORKERS IN TOP 12 MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES IN EGYPT



Source: Assaad (2018)



Some of the general recommendations for moving towards a more gender-egalitarian economy included:

- greater openness and integration into global markets and more realistic exchange rate policies to encourage exports in female-intensive manufacturing sectors such as garment and services such as business process outsourcing.
- promoting high tech industries like basic pharmaceutical products, computer, electronic and optical products appeared hospitable to female employment.
- greater investment in the public services as a means of generating direct, and indirect, employment for women.
- public procurement policies as a means of generating employment for women in sectors where they are likely to predominate.
- quotas and reservations in all government projects and programmes
- extending valued features of public sector employment into the rest of the economy.
- greater attention to industrial location policies and improved access to transport.
- reducing bureaucratic obstacles to innovation and competition
- tackling the exploitative conditions attached to the hiring of migrant labour in migrant-receiving countries like Jordan, the effects of which were to distort demand away from hiring local labour.
- tackling the exploitative conditions faced by migrants from migrant-sending countries like Bangladesh and the need for governments to take greater responsibility for their human rights.



The issue of taxation was recognised as essential to the realisation of many of these policies. The effects of the Dutch disease, the sclerotic nature of many of the establishments described in some of the MENA countries, the “missing middle” in India’s manufacturing sector, a legacy of past regulation of industry (Mazumdar and Sarkar, 2013) and the marked gender segregation of the labour market found across both regions had allowed the profits of larger firms and the wages of their predominantly male workers to be considerably higher than they would have been in more competitive environments. Taxing these protected sectors would be one way to finance the diversification of the economy into production of traded goods and services as well as allowing it to sustain a larger care-giving sector.

7.3 Addressing women’s care responsibilities: a two-pronged approach

Given the importance of women’s domestic responsibilities, including caring for the family, workshop discussions suggested a two-pronged approach. The first was to generate employment opportunities for women directly through investments in the “social infrastructure” of the economy, in other words, in the public provision of services to promote nutrition, health care, care of children and the elderly, quality education and skills. The second was to promote measures which accommodated women’s domestic responsibilities in ways that widened their options in the labour market.



The broader economic rationale for investments in social infrastructure lies in the increasing importance of the “quality” of the labour force to the creation of higher quality jobs and to inclusive growth strategies (Ranis *et al.*, 2000; World Bank¹¹). But there are additional gender equity dividends to such a strategy. Investment in social services generates forms of employment which women are likely to directly benefit from. In addition, such investments are likely to enable the transition to the labour market of women who were otherwise constrained by domestic responsibilities. And finally, greater public responsibility for care services reduces some of the costs of hiring women for private employers.

An illustration of the way that investments in social infrastructure can impact on women's employment comes from India. Jain (2013) estimated the impact on maternal employment of the country's largest child development programme. She found that rural mothers whose children received regular pre-schooling or supplementary feeding were 12 per cent more likely to work, with the effects strongest in central and southern India. The effect appeared to be driven largely by the daycare component implicit in pre-schooling. However, she noted some evidence of discrimination against children from the lowest castes. Rao related an example from her research in Tamil Nadu where a group of women laborers working on farms and in quarries had taken the initiative of pooling contributions to pay the ICDS workers extra fees to look after the children later into the afternoon.

“...rural mothers whose children received regular pre-schooling or supplementary feeding were 12 per cent more likely to work, with the effects strongest in central and southern India.”

11 worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital/brief/about-hcp



Sen discussed the ways in which Ministries of Education could make indirect contributions to reducing women's care responsibilities through, for instance, extending school hours and providing after-school programs. As he pointed out, there is evidence from Latin America that the steady expansion of pre-schools and schools are among the factors that have led to increasing levels of female labour force participation in Latin America (Busso and Fonseca, 2015). Huq (2015) also argued that support for women's unpaid care work could be integrated into different policy areas through careful identification of "care needs" in specific sectors such as education, social protection, labour, and water.

The second prong of the strategy focused on measures that would promote women's ability to take up wage employment in a wider range of sectors beyond traditionally female-intensive ones. Among the reasons that many women failed to enter wage employment, while others dropped out after marriage, related to the difficulties of reconciling the demands of such employment, with the demands of their domestic responsibilities. These difficulties were easier to manage in formal public sector employment because of the greater likelihood of maternity leave and child care support. However, the costs of replicating such provision in the private sector would be likely to lead private sector employers to discriminate against women. This supported the case for at least part of these costs to be shared with the public sector. For the same reason, it was important that child care be made available and affordable on a generalised basis rather than attached to women workers.



The discussion also extended to other measures to promote greater flexibility in working arrangements for both men and women, shorter-term measures that might lead to the longer-term transformation of the labour market. These included shorter working days, greater possibilities for part time work, flexible working hours, locating work places closer to the home and promoting electronic platforms for freelance work. In addition, Assaad suggested that making labour costs variable for employers rather than fixed would also lead to greater flexibility. For instance, specifying minimum wage on an hourly rather than a monthly basis would allow greater flexibility in the hours of labour supplied by men and women and in the costs of hiring labour for employers (Assaad, 2015).

7.4 Safety, mobility and physical infrastructure: transport and utilities

Restrictions on women's time and mobility imposed by their primary responsibility for domestic work and child care together with concerns about their safety in the public domain gives investments in physical infrastructure and utilities a gendered significance. This was illustrated through a number of examples. Sonalde Desai's research using longitudinal data found that improving access to roads and increased bus frequency improved access to off-farm employment for both men and women, although the impact was weaker for women in communities with stricter practices of female seclusion (Lei *et al.*, 2017). Such findings suggest that improving women's physical access to off farm employment in neighbouring towns and villages might help to halt the decline in rural female labour force participation. Similar findings were reported by Das *et al.* (2015): Indian states with higher surfaced road lengths and with higher utilisation of power utilities also reported higher levels of female labour force participation. In Bangladesh, a major road development project had increased the male labour supply by 49 per cent and female supply by 51 per cent (Khandker *et al.*, 2006).



The question of transport and utilities were also raised in relation to questions of safety in the public domain. An earlier study by Rahman and Rao (2004) had found that street lighting and good bus services increased women's mobility after dark and their labour force participation. Participants emphasised the importance of reliable and frequent transport services, well-lit streets and the greater use of CCTV cameras for women's safety in the public domain. Rao (2002) noted that a government literacy campaign in Tamil Nadu in the early 1990s had distributed cycles to young girls to encourage them to go to secondary schools which were often outside their villages. It was initially resisted but over time became an accepted form of transport technology for women, one without transport costs. Ten years later, a study found that ownership of cycles was almost evenly distributed by gender. Rao pointed out that not only did access to cycles address the problem of women's mobility, but it also contributed to their bodily confidence.

A number of countries around the world, including many in South Asia and MENA, have sought to address women's safety concerns through the provision of women-only forms of transport. The reservation of certain seats on buses or compartments in trains for women-only is one example of this. Shahrokni has traced how it provided large number of women in urban Iran a "safe space" for travel, whether for work or social reasons (Shahrokni, 2020). More recent attempts have attempted to promote safe transport in ways that directly contribute to women's employment Baruah (2017). As part of the Women on Wheels initiative in New Delhi, an NGO called Azad Foundation provides professional driving training for poor urban women and organises chauffeur placement services once the women have acquired their licences. In addition, they are also hired by a for-profit taxi company called Sakha cabs. Research on these women suggests they have increased their earning capacity and that the commercial driving carries greater social status than jobs they might otherwise have had. Sakha Cabs' success has motivated a number of other cab companies to experiment with training and hiring women.



7.5 Promoting the quantity and quality of employment: lessons from the field

A significant number of development interventions aimed at promoting women's employment have focused on promoting entrepreneurship on the assumption that higher levels of self-employment among women is a matter of preference reflecting its compatibility with their domestic responsibilities. This has very often taken the form of microfinance or training, with little effort to address the larger constraints that may curtail their capacity to grow their enterprises or to question the factors that led them into self-employment.

As an example of this, Sholkamy cited a microfinance intervention in rural Egypt which sought to link the provision of microcredit to women in a village community to training in skills identified by the community. This led to training in hairdressing, beautician skills and first aid services but a year later, assessment showed that none of these had materialised in the form of enterprises as the demand for such services in a village context were very limited. Participatory needs assessment is unlikely to achieve a great deal in the absence of an understanding of wider market forces that village communities did not have.

In addition, as a number of participants noted, for many women, entrepreneurial activity was a default option, the failure to find other more productive forms of work, rather than a response to opportunity. Nor was there any guarantee that they had the capacity needed to make a success of their enterprises. The women micro-entrepreneurs in the research project by Al-Dajani and Marlow (2019), whose refugee status placed them in positions of "permanent temporariness" were an example of this phenomenon. She found that the support provided by local NGOs and microfinance organisations had little impact on their capacity to grow, presumably because the support did not address their constraints. Those among them who did report some degree of growth attributed it to resources they were able to mobilise through their own initiative: family support, use of social media, quality of product and



service, and marketing tactics. These women would have benefited from legal recognition of their entrepreneurial activity, simplification of procedures to register their businesses and from the development of a comprehensive directory of refugee support and services. In addition, she emphasised the importance of efforts to break down the isolation of refugee women in the way that the ENID project (discussed below) was trying to do. This could be done by encouraging refugee women to join forces to create community enterprises rather than operating on an individual basis.

7.5.1 The creation of employment opportunities for women: The ENID/El Nidaa initiative in Egypt

The ENID/ El Nidaa initiative, described by Heba Handoussa, offered a ground level experience of the challenge of creating self- and wage-employment opportunities for women in an inhospitable environment¹². The initiative is located in Qena in Upper Egypt, one of the poorest and most socially conservative areas in the country. It also has the lowest rates of literacy and female labour force participation rates in the country and around 80 per cent unemployment among men.

The ENID project is located under the Ministry of Investment and International Cooperation (MIIC). The non-profit El Nidaa Foundation exists in parallel with the project and is registered with the Ministry of Social Solidarity. The initiative was initially planned as a five year project funded by UNDP in 2012 but was then extended to 2021.

The initiative takes an integrated area-based approach to employment creation. It uses participatory consultations with women in the area to better understand the nature of constraints they face in taking up paid work and then collaborates with different sections of the community to find ways of addressing these constraints. These consultations revealed early on that women in the province wanted paid employment but for shorter number of hours a day. They also wanted employment

12 eg.undp.org/content/egypt/en/home/operations/projects/sustainable-development/ENID.html



outside the home, working with other women and contributing to the community, rather than being “trapped” within the home, confined to their socially ascribed roles of mothers and wives.

The strategy of the initiative has been to combine various measures to create pathways to paid employment that would not meet with resistance from the community. For instance, the fact that male unemployment in the province is around 70 per cent means that the project has adopted the pragmatic approach of generating jobs for women in sectors and occupations that considered culturally suitable rather than pitting them against men in competing for jobs in male dominated sector. It has demonstrated, for instance, that many care services, such as health services, elderly care and pre-school education, are best provided through decentralised provision, based on a partnership between the local state and civil society organisations. But it has also generated work in a wider range of activities in light manufacturing and sustainable agriculture, including in some cases, activities that were traditionally associated with men (Box 6).

Box 6: ENID/EI Nidaa projects

- Capacity building: literacy classes, vocational training workshops, building community awareness, building NGO capacity and training of trainers.
- Service provision: early childhood interventions, health related intervention.
- Entrepreneurship: promotion of micro, small and medium scale enterprise in furniture making, RMG and wood products, handicrafts, nurseries and schools and storage/exhibition of handicrafts.
- Agricultural enterprise: safe milk processing, backyard poultry production, integrated fish farms, roof gardens, farmer field schools, recycling agricultural residues, safe goat raising, molasses production and marketing, beekeeping and honey production, greenhouses and sericulture.



Other critical elements in its approach have been the introduction of the six-hour working day in its employment initiatives; promoting employment through small workshops and producer co-operatives; bringing training and jobs close to women's home; using participatory approaches to creating "buy in" and ownership from those it works with and experimenting with new products, technologies and markets to open up new possibilities and expand its scope of activity.

The initiative relies on local community organisations to implement these various interventions. This has required it to invest in capacity building to reorient these organisations away from their previous charity orientation to a developmental one. The interventions in question are designed to generate profits so that they can be sustained by these organisations in the future.

The initiative is currently piloting and scaling up over 50 different interventions in 75 villages, directly or indirectly reaching over 20,000 people. Its overall goal is to achieve scalability by replicating these interventions across the southern province of Egypt. The project works in partnership with local government, engaging its administrators to act as champions of change. It also uses its monitoring and evaluation system both to track its own performance but also to document the conditions that lead to successes. This allows it to accumulate lessons about what is most effective in bringing about normative and behavioral change and provide policy makers with options and solutions and diffusion of ideas across the entire governorate. The project costs various interventions and links them to the SDGs when it reports to the government because governments want to be seen to be making progress on the SDGs.



7.5.2 Promoting “quality”, defending rights: SEWA’s experience in India

Renana Jhabvala’s presentation on SEWA’s experience synthesized lessons from efforts to support working women in India’s informal economy¹³. SEWA is a membership-based organisation of women workers which founded in the 1970s and which currently has around 1.7 million members. Its focus is on women from low-income households who are already in some kind of employment, some at home, some close to home and some at considerable distance from home. Unlike the ENID/El Nidaa initiative, which seeks to create “quality” employment for women, SEWA is engaged in improving the quality of existing employment and defending the rights of women workers. It has a dual strategy of providing practical support to working women through various forms of social enterprise (co-operatives, companies, associations) and organising them into unions to improve working conditions and claim their rights. Box 7 summarises some of the practical interventions it has carried out with various groups of workers. As Jhabvala’s presentation highlighted, SEWA increasingly supports evaluations of its various practical interventions.

“ SEWA is engaged in improving the quality of existing employment and defending the rights of women workers. It has a dual strategy of providing practical support to working women through various forms of social enterprise (co-operatives, companies, associations) and organising them into unions to improve working conditions and claim their rights. ”

**Box 7: Promoting employment “quality”**

- **Agricultural sector:** SEWA works with women farmers who lack official recognition and are hence unable to access technology, seeds and other inputs. It has organised these women into groups, federations and companies to enable collective purchase of machinery for use and renting, trained them in new methods and business management, and helped them access government subsidies. It has set up livestock cooperatives and linked them to State Milk Federations and private dairy chains so that they are directly paid for their products. It has also trained women as “goat doctors” in order to improve survival and health of small livestock.
- **Entrepreneurship:** SEWA has promoted self-help groups, cooperatives and companies to strengthen the capacity of women to run their own enterprises; provided loans, savings, micro-insurance and micro-pensions to women and integrated credit and skills through a collaboration between SEWA Bank and the National Skill Development Corporation.
- **Home-based work.** It has formed home-based garment workers into producer co-operatives and linked them to international brands interested in ethical sourcing.
- **Domestic work:** It has formed these workers into co-operatives in order to promote the professionalisation of domestic work and home care services. The co-operatives negotiate terms and conditions with employers so that they can no longer treat domestics as slaves.
- **Construction industry:** SEWA provides training to unskilled women workers in the construction industry to help them attain semi-skilled and skilled status. Its greatest success so far has been among tribal women in Jharkhand who reported increased days of work and higher income after the training.
- **Services:** SEWA works with municipalities to provide basic infrastructure services in water and sanitation as well as forming co-operatives to provide care services. This have been found to contribute to reducing the stress of working mothers along with increasing their incomes.
- **Educated unemployed:** SEWA provides training to boost their self-confidence, familiarise them with how markets work and provide basic marketable skills that are lacking in formal education (computer literacy, language skills).



Along with these various practical initiatives to improve the returns to women's labour in various informal activities and create a range of support services, SEWA also undertakes trade union action to defend the right to employment for its members and improve the "quality" of their work. It ran an extended campaign to gain official recognition for the size and contribution of its members to India's economy. It explained Indian census questions to its membership so that they responded accurately to questions about their work status. Its collaboration with national research institutes led to the establishment by the Indian government of the Expert Group on Defining the Informal Sector and later to the ILO's International Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics. These efforts have led to redefinitions of work at national and international levels which better capture informal activities.

It joined with the National Centre for Labour and other organisations to press for a universal system of social security that covered workers in the informal economy. The adoption of the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Bill, 2008 went some way towards meeting this demand by providing social security and insurance protection for informal workers, including universal health insurance, life insurance and old age pension benefits.

It fought for official recognition of its members through engagement with the state: identity cards for beedi workers which would give them health benefits and facilitating farmers' access to state subsidies, seeds and loans. It took the case of street vendors' rights to employment to the country's High Courts and Supreme Court; organised domestic workers to demand better conditions and greater respect for their work; and took action to ensure construction workers were registered with Welfare Boards and given accident care and to protest against sexual harassment.



7.6 Social protection: protecting and promoting livelihoods

Workshop participants noted that social protection measures have evolved from their earlier safety net functions of helping people to cope with crisis into a broader range of objectives which include the protection and promotion of livelihoods. The innovative features of a number of these within the two regions were singled out in the discussion.

Sholkamy pointed out that a major challenge in the Egyptian context was to persuade policy makers that large sections of the work force, who were classified as the “working poor”, should be entitled to social benefits in the form of cash transfers. Earlier generation of cash transfers in the country had been targeted to the unemployed on the assumption that anyone who was earning an income could take care of themselves and their families. This took no account of either returns to work or the conditions under which work was undertaken. De-linking cash transfers from employment status meant that receipt of the transfer did not prevent women from participating in some form of paid work. Research from a low-income urban neighborhood in Egypt suggests that women who received these transfers were now working fewer days but in better quality work (Sholkamy, 2017).

India's MNREGS was discussed as an example of a social protection scheme which generated employment opportunities for both men and women in rural areas and had various gender-sensitive features built into the design: a 30 per cent quota for women, equal minimum wages, requirement of a creche if more than 5 women were working on a project, provision for holding officials accountable. While these features were not always implemented, the scheme had clearly proved attractive to women in search of work as it has far exceeded its quota – though much more in states where restrictions on women's mobility were less strictly enforced. It had also led to a rise in agricultural wages, with a greater increase in women's wages. Bangladesh had also sought



to implement an employment guarantee scheme along the lines of the Indian one. In line with the earlier point about women's preference for state-generated employment, there was evidence from research in India and Bangladesh that women preferred to work on the NREGS than for private landlords and contractors.

However, as Indira Hirway pointed out, the MNREGS could have done more to address gender inequities in rural areas. While it used unemployed labour in rural areas to create assets and infrastructure, recommendations by gender advocates that this labour could be used to create assets which reduced women's unpaid workloads, such as drinking water facilities, afforestation of common lands for fuel and firewood had gone largely unheeded.

The Targeting the Ultra Poor program pioneered in Bangladesh to promote entrepreneurship among women and families in extreme poverty through a combination of asset transfers, a consumption stipend, health support and intensive training and mentoring has now been piloted in different countries and scaled up in many of them. A qualitative evaluation of one of these pilots in West Bengal, both at the end of the pilot and eight years later, found that, in contrast to the other pilots, as well as to the program in Bangladesh, it was the poorest and most socially marginalised, women from tribal households, who reported the greatest progress. Key to this finding was the fact that this pilot had opted to add a self-help group component to the BRAC design, thus embedding women's efforts in a wider social network. While there were clear improvements in livelihood security in the immediate aftermath of the project, an evaluation carried out 8 years later found that progress had been unevenly sustained: what had lasted were the lessons and self-confidence imparted through the training and mentoring (Kabeer and Datta, forthcoming).



7.7 Training, awareness raising and capacity building

What was broadly described as training and capacity building in workshop discussions, in fact, covered a range of different issues including the transfer of technical skills and know-how, building women's self-confidence and raising public awareness. The need to improve women's technical skills came up repeatedly as part of efforts to improve the productivity and returns to their labour.

The focus in the ENID/Nidaa initiative in Egypt was to train women for work in feminised activities, for the reasons laid out earlier, but it was regarded as pioneering work because it opened up market opportunities outside the home for women who had previously been outside the labour force. In the Indian context, where women from poor and socially marginalised groups have always worked in the public domain, SEWA carried out a range of training including training women for work in sectors that were still male-dominated. Their efforts proved to be more effective among women who had been engaged for some time in economic activity, such as women farmers and construction workers, than young educated unemployed women whose aspirations did not match the jobs available. As Jhabvala commented, women had to be very ambitious to break into non-traditional forms of employment.

Joeke noted the example of a training initiative in Morocco (FORSATY) that was carried out by community institutions, with donor support. Its main aim was to increase the basic employability of its graduates. It lasted just three months as opposed to the two years training that SEWA provided but it did follow up its graduates with longer term mentoring and counselling services. What was also noteworthy about it was that the classes were mixed and there was no effort to reproduce gender norms so that women could take up work in male dominated sectors.



“ Along with the transfer of technical and practical skills, workshop participants were interested in the use of training efforts of various kinds which sought to address stereotypes and change attitudes – of women themselves and those around them. ”

Public policy should also anticipate mechanisation displacing wage work and train those affected in other skills. In Bangladesh, there was now greater recognition of the skills deficits identified by Raihan with efforts by both government and NGOs to address it. Examples offered by Huq included a partnership between BRAC and the Government of Bangladesh which seeks to integrate skills training with general education as part of its Access to Information programme while BRAC Skill Programme and the Institute of Skill development offered short term courses on both conventional sectors but also growing unconventional sectors such as hospitality, sales and marketing, IT, graphic design, etc. There were also efforts to train female garment workers in technology-based skills so that they could handle new technology.

There was some discussion about how internet technology could be used to open up new routes for women's enterprises. It was noted that across cities in South Asia and MENA, women had been able to open up various delivery services and marketing businesses, but largely on their own initiative and using the skills and contacts they possessed. It was also pointed out that training in digital skills could also open up routes to waged employment, such as book keeping, tele-marketing, graphic design and data entry. SEWA was exploring the potential for using the internet for domestic care services in urban India. The margins for domestic work were very small so that offering internet services could only be done on a collective basis, rather than as individuals. There was scope therefore to design policies to expand the scale and outreach of these efforts in ways that reached poorer women in urban areas as well as more women in rural areas.



Along with the transfer of technical and practical skills, workshop participants were interested in the use of training efforts of various kinds which sought to address stereotypes and change attitudes – of women themselves and those around them. Participants noted that most of the training carried out in response to women's employment needs focused on women themselves but there was also a need to raise awareness among employers. Joeques, for instance, suggested that employers needed to know about the real operating costs of hiring women: challenging stereotypes with facts. Nazier called for advocacy campaigns that would disseminate information about equal rights as well as the significance of women's contribution to the economies of growth and well-being.

For women themselves, socially transformative training called for greater emphasis on soft skills and psychological empowerment as a dimension of training. As an example of a successful effort along these lines, Roy cited a study she had carried out with colleagues on the impact of training carried out by an NGO with sex workers in urban West Bengal (Ghosal *et al.*, 2019). The study found an increase in the self-confidence reported by a group of workers who suffer considerable stigma and social marginalisation but also changes in their savings and health-seeking behavior that were still in evidence in a later study. The idea of integrating psychological empowerment with regular skills training programs has now been adopted by the West Bengal government at its SHG training sessions.



The question of consciousness also came up in relation to sexual interactions between men and women, the need to change how they saw themselves and each other, the need for mutual respect. Among the various suggestions put forward were:

- teaching women self-defence.
- highlighting successful female role models as a means of expanding women's aspirations.
- working with boys and young men to promote respect for women and girls.
- classes in youth livelihoods and sex education.
- Reforming outdated curricula and gender-based teaching methods: encouraging girls to engage in sports so as to become comfortable with their bodies while teaching boys how to cook and do housework

As Roy pointed, gender norms and stereotypes were slow to change and had to be tackled early in the lives of boys and girls before they became internalised as part of their gender identities. She spoke of human rights organisation that had tried to do this in secondary schools in Haryana (Dhar *et al.*, 2018). Facilitators from the organisations held interactive class room discussions with both boys and girls: topics included gender identity, values, aspirations, gender roles and stereotypes, and recognition and tolerance of discrimination. An evaluation of the experiment found that both boys and girls reported changes in attitudes and behavior, with boys reporting greater change than girls.



7.8 The politics of “recognition”

While improving measurement of women's work has a technical dimension to it, gaining more accurate information about how the market economy works, and its intersection with the economy of well-being, it was also important for gaining social recognition and policy support for workers. One of the recommendations that came out of Najjar's work in rural Egypt was the need for official recognition of women working in agriculture as workers. The problem was particularly pronounced for women in the wage work category who are listed as “housewives” on their national IDs when men were listed as “agricultural worker” (Najjar *et al.*, 2017). More accurate measurement and labelling of women's work would allow the framing of equal pay legislation for men and women in agriculture, justify their inclusion in agricultural extension services and the recruitment of more women into these services and enable the design of social protection measures to protect and promote livelihood security.

These efforts have gone further in India. As noted earlier, SEWA has a long history of working with the government and international agencies to improve their data collecting efforts so that they could better capture women's contribution to the economy and gain recognition for their status as workers. The current challenge was to extend these efforts to women working in the agricultural sector. Both Mahajan and Rao discussed recent efforts to gain recognition for these women by MAKAAAM (Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch, a network of women farmers' organisations), which had proposed the Women Farmer's Entitlement Bill in the Indian Parliament a few years ago. The bill sought to lay out a process of recognising women who declared themselves as farmers. The network had been lobbying to get local panchayats to issue identity cards which would register women as agricultural workers and enable their access to various state entitlements, such as credit, subsidies, water and so on.



Because the network used the FAO's extended definition of farming, women engaged in livestock rearing and forest produce collection were also included but it was restricted to households with land, thereby excluding women working on sharecropped or leased land. It was nevertheless very radical in its implications. It demanded women have equal right of ownership in inherited land of the husband and that they should be recognised as farmers with full entitlement to government subsidies, loans and other forms of policy support to the agricultural sector. The bill was not passed but it remains an active issue: the previous year, the National Commission for Women had once again tried, and failed, to persuade the Minister of Agriculture to give it support.

Gazdar reported on how his organisation (the Collective for Social Research in Karachi) had used their improved measures of women's work in agriculture in Sindh (discussed earlier) as the basis for political and legal advocacy to gain recognition for women's status as primary agricultural workers in place of their current status as subsidiary workers or "helpers". These efforts have met with some success. On the policy front, the Sindh government has announced dedicated programmes for women agricultural workers, a group who were not previously recognised as workers.

On the legal front, the Sindh Assembly passed what has been described as a "historic" law in December 2019¹⁴. The Sindh Women Agricultural Workers Bill grants legal recognition to women working in farming, fisheries and livestock. They will be given written contracts and receive payment in cash, with the same minimum wage as male workers. The law also grants them political rights, including the right to form a union to engage in collective bargaining, as well as social rights, including the right to maternity leave and to register for the Benazir Women Income Agricultural Worker's Card which allows them to apply for government credit, social security and subsidies. Gazdar reported that their organisation had studied the Indian draft bill very closely to help in drawing up the Sindh bill.

¹⁴ 'Sindh cabinet approves "historic" bill recognising women farm workers' contribution' dawn.com/news/1501437 – accessed 6 December 2019.



Partly inspired by the work of SEWA, the Collective has also been lobbying for a system of associations of agricultural workers that could be formed into a federation and could be represented in local arbitration councils. This is in order to increase their voice in local affairs, of particular importance for agricultural laborers who are paid on a piece rate basis. At present, the labour department is unable to cope with efforts to register a union of women agricultural workers because it does not fit into its standard model of trade unions made up of full-time workers and fixed employers. Pressing for these demands may provide the impetus for changing the practices of the labour department.

However, Gazdar cautioned that while it was possible to design measures in areas and activities that were seen to fall within women's domain, like others at the workshop, he believed it would be harder to extend such support to areas that were seen to lie outside their domain. The challenge was to find the spaces in between: "small but concrete steps" in the right direction. For example, in communities where women have been prominently involved in goat rearing, the next possible step would be to design programmes that designated the goats as belonging to women themselves rather than to "the family" and hence its head. Small changes such as this could be used to leverage larger changes in the future.

7.9 More data or more useful data?

Finally, there was a discussion about possible tensions between the demands of gender scholars and advocates for more data and the need for data that was useful for policy purposes. There was agreement at the workshop that a more systematic understanding of "work" from a gender perspective, distinguishing between its "quantity" and "quality" dimensions, was essential but there was some concern that extending the definition of work to include work in the unpaid care economy might extend the definition so far that it became meaningless to talk about work, since all useful activities would be classified as work and most women would be found to be fully active all the time.



As Joeques pointed out, discussions about unpaid care work can be useful, for instance, at the community level when men and women sit down in groups and compare time use diaries to identify what kind of contributions they are making: this can be a revelation for both women and men. But further data on unpaid work is unlikely to tell policy makers and policy advocates what they don't already know. She suggested that the more important challenge was how best to use the existing data on unpaid work.

In her recent work for the OECD which examined how governments were addressing unpaid care work, since it is one of the SDG targets, she found that most governments were not addressing the issue at all. Insofar as they were interested in care work, it was from the perspective of those who needed care, the “consumers” of care: this agenda mainly features the elderly, the sick, the handicapped and children, with investments in early child development leading this agenda. This is in response to a strong body of evidence that the earlier the investment in children, the greater the gains on a number of different fronts. Such evidence had clearly gained traction with policy makers. The information on unpaid care work needed to be presented in a way that could bolster its policy significance.

A similar point was made by Desai concerning the dangers of “maximalist” advocacy for data. It is widely known that women are more likely than men to be working constantly and to undertake multiple tasks, particularly if their family is poor, since they must fetch water and collect firewood along with earning a living. Such work, however essential to the family, is not necessarily what women aspire to do. She suggested the need to make a distinction between the time allocated to an activity and the reward and recognition that it receives. While care work is clearly important, it could expand to fill the time available. Discussions about “time poverty” need to distinguish between time spent on essential activities, with little choice available to women, and more discretionary uses of their time. The policy challenge is to find ways of expanding the discretionary use of women's time, where this use could include rest and leisure as well as economic activity.



Furthermore, while feminist advocacy for data on women's unpaid work is right and important, it can come up against limitations of existing statistical systems. In India, national systems that used to hire regular employees are now hiring them on a sub-contracted basis (Desai and Joshi, 2019). With statistical systems deteriorating and data demands increasing, greater attention will have to be focused on the trade-offs between more data, better-quality data and useful data.

Desai suggested the need for centers to set up experimental data units before mainstreaming it into the large data collection systems. Gazdar recommended that a qualitative phase should precede the design of large surveys. Such surveys need to standardise large amounts of information across people, categories and communities and generally assume the size of the sample will take care of errors. But large surveys are unable to respond to specific situations which may affect large numbers of people: eg, his organisation was interested in trying to understand the economy of irrigated areas in a particular province on which there was very little information in existing data sets. Detailed qualitative methods could be used to understand sectors of the economy that are not formalised and that need to be made visible. Once this understanding was obtained it was possible to translate them meaningfully into survey questions. Sholkamy added that methods needed to be selected on the basis of the information being sought. The use of case studies could help to illuminate the dynamics that prevailed in specific contexts in a way that large data sets and a preoccupation with averages would not be able to do.



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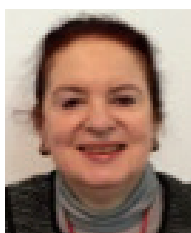
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Ashwini Deshpande is Professor of Economics at Ashoka University, India. She has worked on the economics of discrimination and affirmative action, with a focus on caste and gender in India. She has published extensively in leading scholarly journals. She is the author of *Grammar of Caste: economic discrimination in contemporary India*, (2011, Oxford University Press, New Delhi) and *Affirmative Action in India* (2013, Oxford University Press, India). She is the co-editor of *Boundaries of Clan and Color: Transnational Comparisons of Inter-Group Disparity* (2003, Routledge, London); *Globalization and Development: A Handbook of New Perspectives* (2007, Oxford University Press, UK); *Capital Without Borders: Challenges to Development* (2010, Anthem Press, UK) and *Global Economic Crisis and the Developing World* (with Keith Nurse) (2012, Routledge, London).



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Renana Jhabvala has been active for many decades in organising women in the informal economy into trade unions, co-operatives and financial institutions in India, and has been extensively involved in policy issues relating to poor women and the informal economy. She is best known for her long association with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India, and for her writings on issues of women in the informal economy. She was Member of UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2016-2017).



Susan Joeques is an independent researcher, currently a Research Associate of SOAS, University of London, with special interest in the economics of gender relations in the Middle East and North Africa. She was for many years a Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK and has been on the staff of the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and Canada's International Development Research Centre, where she managed global and regional programming on gender and development, trade, employment, SMEs and entrepreneurship, and competition policy.



Naila Kabeer is joint professor of Gender and Development at the Departments of International Development and Gender Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is author of a number of books, including *The power to choose:*

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She recently retired from the World Bank where she worked in Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Her work for the World Bank covered macroeconomics as well as labor markets, poverty issues and the economic role of refugees.



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This report builds on the contributions to a workshop organised by the International Department and the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (UK) in collaboration with Ashoka University (India) and the Economic Research Forum (Egypt). It was funded by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research as part of a project on gender and labour market dynamics in West Bengal (2016-2019).

Design: LSE Design Unit (**lse.ac.uk/designunit**)

ISBN: 978-1-909890-64-0

DOI: 10.21953/lse.yc6ageewu5yi.