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#### 4. THE SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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Some of the problems of employment for young women obviously stem from the conditions of general under-development. Indeed, the general rule is that the more restricted employment opportunities for young people in general are, the more do the existing opportunities tend to be reserved for men. But here attention will be directed more towards the problems which are specific only to women and which characterise their situation.

*Lack of  
data*

The first problem in a consideration of the employment of women is that of measurement. Statistics which only take account of paid work - whether in money wages or in kind - are inapplicable and misleading in that much of women's work - in agriculture or in domestic settings - is unpaid. Therefore it is difficult to get an accurate idea of the magnitude of the problem and it is frequently understated. For example, if one wished to compare rates of unemployment for men and women, figures giving the number of those without paid jobs would over-emphasize the female situation as many women, although unpaid, are, if anything, overworked. On the other hand, definitions such as that used by Callaway (1), where he defines married women as being unemployed only if they possess specific qualifications, such as nurses or teachers, will underestimate the problem and, furthermore, in a skewed and biased way, are effectively ignoring the uneducated or those only with basic general education. These problems pertain when talking about women of any age, including necessarily young women. Young women prior to marriage will, of course, always depend more upon employment than older women. It is probably better, therefore, to use a general concept such as 'engagement in productive activity' rather than the more confining concept of employment, which seems to implicitly infer paid labour (Although even the concept of productive activity is often value-laden and may be used in a narrow sense, ignoring or underestimating women's vital

*Defining  
female  
unemployment*

contribution to everyday life in terms of their domestic tasks, child care, etc.. Therefore it should always be used in a broader sense which recognises and includes these valuable activities.) When the problem is put in this way, it becomes clear that the main problems affecting women may be more those of poverty, inferior status, lack of claim to a proper share in family income, etc. rather than lack of employment.

### **Women in the Traditional Sector**

Traditionally, women often have several activities in which they take part - domestic work and agriculture or home craft industries or trading, the precise mixture or share of women in these activities depending on local traditions. As already mentioned, the problem is not so much that they are un - or under-employed in any or all of these activities but rather that in all of them they have very low productivities or at any rate low incomes - they are usually the majority of the 'working poor'. Solutions therefore must lie in (a) raising the productivity of the existing occupations or the incomes associated with them and/or (b) pulling down the barriers, economic and socio-cultural, which presently debar women who wish to participate from entry into the wage labour force working in different occupations with higher productivity. Before studies can be made and policies implemented to bring about these changes though there is a basic and pressing need for more information about the present situation, about how women in different settings divide up their time, their daily routines, time spent on different activities, etc. A further point to make is that, although we are here considering young women, a fair proportion of these will already be married and quite possibly also have small children, in which case their problems will be somewhat different from those of young unmarried women, as from married women with older or grown-up children.

*Low productivity*

*Lack of basic information*

*Discrimination starts early*

The path leading towards the discrimination against young women and their confinement by and large to low productivity and dependent activities starts at school and before. A smaller proportion of girls than boys receive education at any level, the gap

*Educational  
bias:  
research needs*

between the two often increasing with age and stage of education. This may be because of cultural beliefs of the inferiority of the women's status or capacities, so that education is therefore to some extent wasted upon her. However, even those who remain in school are not spared from treatment founded upon this inherent belief and from another which logically follows on from it, i.e. that activities can be divided into those which are intrinsically 'female' and those which are intrinsically 'male' (this even extends to jobs in the modern sector), and that those which are female are by and large lowly, unproductive, unskilled or badly paid. Research should be carried out to see whether these ideas are embedded in the curricula of rural and urban primary schools. Are girls and boys taught different subjects in different ways; the girls getting lessons in home economics while the boys get pre-vocational courses which help them to decide upon what they will do after school and to prepare for it? Traditional attitudes are often blamed for a large part of the problems of young women but these are hardly likely to be overcome if teaching in primary schools is segregated in this way. Has any experiment ever been made of teaching young boys elements of home economics, child care, etc.? If so, were there any positive results in terms of a change of attitudes towards women and girls and their roles? If no such experiment has ever been tried, perhaps one could be set up and the results monitored.

*Primary school  
leavers*

If a girl fails to pass from primary to secondary school, as of course the great majority do, she has been prepared for nothing except domestic or subsistence activities. The female primary school leaver is seen as constituting a special problem. Family constraints prevent her from migrating to the town in most developing countries, Latin America being the great exception, and therefore a need for special programmes at village level is recognised. "In many African societies, however, women often show an aptitude for and an inclination towards handicrafts, including pottery, weaving, dyeing, basket-work, etc. and training programmes should be devised to accommodate this." This

*Traditional  
training*

training, together with special programmes at village level "... provide an opportunity for the young girl to retain the skills acquired in school and possibly the opportunity through small scale craft activities of some cash earning. The role of this kind of programme is to provide for the young girl with some schooling a satisfying bridge between school and marriage." (2)

Therefore often already the young boy starts to get training in productive skills while the young girls get taught traditional skills in such a way that they are unlikely to raise the usually low productivity of these crafts or to see them as something beyond a bridge between school and marriage in that there is not the premise underlying their training, as there is for that of young boys, that they are preparing for future productive employment. Retraining suggested in the preceding paragraph may be a useful suggestion which is much better than doing nothing at all and which could improve welfare in many directions, yet it is not a fully satisfactory answer to the total problem.

#### **New possibilities**

*Traditional  
teaching:  
new approaches*

Firstly, there is a place for such subjects as home economics and traditional crafts to be taught but they must be taught in a manner and context which opens rather than closes horizons for the young girl. Home economics can be taught not only as an end in itself, and, as already point out, not necessarily only to girls, but as a means of freeing the girl for other work should she wish to do it. At present women in the developing countries spend a very large percentage of their time on domestic tasks such as drawing water and preparing food, therefore any equipment or knowledge which would cut down this time would obviously be an advancement. Research into the possibilities of simple equipment which would ease the execution of these domestic tasks should be carried out. These are more likely to be accepted by the younger girls as they have less experience of the traditional methods than older women and could be demonstrated at schools. There is obviously also a case for having young, educated women on the staff of such research bodies as they will have a better

*Reducing  
domestic  
burdens*

knowledge of the exact problems to be overcome. Knowledge of nutrition is obviously also vitally important as young women often already have, and certainly will have in the future, young children whose future mental and physical development can be greatly affected by the nutrition they receive in their infancy.

*Teaching new  
attitudes and  
skills*

Secondly, if traditional crafts are going to be taught at schools they too should be taught in a different way, in an attempt to improve the young girl's productivity in them and in view of changing external conditions. They should be taught in the same way as skills are taught to boys - not merely with the status of a bridging occupation between school and marriage. As well as the actual craft itself the girls could be taught the elements of book-keeping and managing a business, about marketing, etc. In that way there is a greater likelihood of the girl being able to set up on her own after school. Girls often learn crafts informally too, from female relatives, and as with boys learning skills, there should be efforts made to upgrade the skills of the woman imparting her own skill to her pupils and a movement to give the relationship between the two more of the legal and, hopefully eventually, social status of an apprenticeship. Examples of all female craft co-operatives in various parts of Africa show that young women can organise themselves into productive units - although, of course, there is nothing to say that men cannot be included in these schemes as well.

*Agricultural  
training*

Apart from crafts women have traditionally played a major part in agriculture in many less developed countries. However, there is still extreme suspicion or even hostility towards the idea of young girls taking part in agricultural training programmes. However, they should be treated as any other aspiring young farmer, especially in view of the fact that many of them will be effective heads of household if their husbands migrate to towns leaving them in the country as often happens. However, mere training in agricultural methods is not enough. Girls must also be given courses in farm management and in rural leadership, both of other young girls and women in particular but also

*Extension  
programmes*

of the wider community in general, though any attempts of theirs to put this into practice will most likely be met with resistance, both cultural and legal. More research is needed into the status of women in relation to land rights, and how this could be put to rights if it is discriminatory. This applies equally in communally owned and managed ventures as in privately owned land. More attention should be paid in land reform and associated research and technical assistance to such problems relating to women. Greater attention should be paid to the female farmers by the extension workers and in particular it has been suggested that women might respond more readily if these were female rather than male. "If women extension workers are felt to be the answer, how many are needed and what type of training would be most appropriate? ...it is recommended that studies be conducted to find out the views of the rural women themselves." (3)

*Representation  
of women*

The views of all women should be heard far more often - the older because of their experience, but also the younger because they are the ones who will be most affected in the future by far-ranging decisions taken today. They are also the ones most likely to take easily to a more vocal role. Most importantly the views of young men and women - the latter traditionally excluded because of both age and sex, should be given a place on development planning boards, etc.. A supporting structure of women's organisations would strengthen the claim for this representation and make it easier to appoint individuals who spoke for others as well. But how can such organisations best be encouraged? One suggestion is the provision of leadership programmes (4), although the exact format of these would need careful deliberation. Another suggestion is for government grants and loans to women's groups for their co-operatives, self-help and development projects, such loans presumably strengthening existing organisations and acting as an encouragement to the formation of new ones. (5)

*Facilities for  
women workers*

There is also scope for the possibilities of some kind of self-help child care scheme, creches or nurseries. Experimental day care centres could be

set up and reactions to and consequences of them examined. This could be tied in with surveys of women's attitudes to work and the reasons they tend to go in for some crafts/occupations/professions more than others. For example, is the previously noted preference of girls for handicrafts not so much because it is somehow intrinsically work satisfying to women but because of more mundane and therefore alterable reasons, such as it allows time for domestic work and child care? If these constraints were removed, through the better organisation of domestic life, the use of simple labour saving devices and the provision of child care facilities, would these preferences still hold? Similarly with opportunities for girls with secondary or higher education. It has been noted (6), especially for younger women as these are the ones with more education, that there is a much greater proportion of women in the professions than in higher (or lower for that matter) administrative jobs. However, upon closer inspection it turns out that this is because of a great predominance of women in two professions, namely teaching and nursing. Other professions, such as the law, are still very much male strongholds. More research is needed into why these professions and not others attract and accept more women. Is it because they fit in well with other, for example, domestic, commitments, because they are considered more 'respectable' for girls, or because their work content is inherently more congenial? Similarly are men content to let women enter these professions whereas they are often extremely hostile to the thought of their doing other high level jobs because they pay worse, have lower status, are considered not fitting work for men, or what? As women do already have a strong foothold in nursing though, this should be used to its full advantage. Research should be carried out to discover what the potentialities are for work as para-professionals in the health services, for example as medical auxiliaries in rural health centres, an occupation which is likely to expand fairly considerably in the future. It should also be found out what measures can be taken to ensure that women have equal opportunities in getting the training for such jobs along with men. Similarly, in relation

*Women in the  
professions*

*Equal access  
to training*

to young women working on family planning programmes, especially as it is probably, if developed countries' experiences are anything to go by, that as young women see better openings for themselves in employment they will voluntarily and spontaneously decide to make greater use of family planning services.

### **Women in the Urban Sector**

This brings up the question of the special problems facing the more educated girls and their employment chances - normally taken to mean their employment chances in the modern urban sector. This identification of the educated with the modern is in itself in some ways a mistake; the educated young person, whether male or female, has a lot to offer in other sectors as well, and it is the idea that the informal rural and especially the agricultural sectors are fit only for the uneducated which has led to so much migration to urban areas and to the unemployment problems encountered there. Before looking at the problems of the educated girl though, the plight of the less well educated urban girl may be briefly examined. The urban girl is in some ways in a weaker position than that of the girl in the country because she at least, even if her education has left her without any productive skills, can often participate in, albeit near subsistence level, agriculture, crafts or small-scale trading. If the urban girl has not learnt any specific skills, and the chances are very much that she will not have, she has less openings available to her. By far the most important activity of urban women in many parts of Africa, aside from domestic duties, is trade, and it is quite likely that the uneducated urban girl will try her hand at this. Again though, this is for the majority of women, a low productivity, low reward activity, requiring often long hours at the market. She will probably start by sitting in with an established female trader, eventually working for her or setting up on her own, as very little capital is usually required for this. (7) As with crafts and agriculture the possibilities of training for these girls should be examined not in trading as such but in how to manage such small-scale enterprises, how to keep books, etc.. Studies have found that female-run

*Unskilled  
urban girls*



businesses such as this small-scale trading are nearly always on a much smaller scale than male-run businesses. (8) The reasons for this should be discovered - are the restraints time (because of domestic commitments), capital, other businessmen or government hostility or some other factors? What can be done to combat this? What are the potentialities and possibilities for women traders to organise themselves into co-operatives or other groupings and would this be beneficial?

*Job seekers*

Further figures should be collected on the number of girls and young women seeking jobs. What kinds of jobs are they looking for and how successful are they? How do they fare in relation to similarly qualified men? How helpful are employment exchanges and do they discriminate in the kinds of jobs they notify young men and women about? In particular the modern sector would appear to present an almost closed door to young women, except for the most lowly and unskilled jobs which men often do not wish to do, and even here it is often older, widowed or divorced women who get most of the jobs. Education and training are often the constraints here. Less women get the degree of training to qualify them for the better jobs, but girls also do less well than young men in the lower level jobs even when they have the same extent of education. It should be found out why this is so. Often it may be a question of attitudes, in that modern sector work is thought to be not quite respectable for young girls, but is this all? Would government campaigns and a 'publicity relations' job have any effect upon this image of the modern sector? Does the government in fact really want to encourage young girls to get themselves better jobs or is it just paying lip service to this idea? The fact that very well educated girls find it far more difficult to find jobs within government administration than similarly qualified young men does add some substance to this suspicion.

*The modern sector*

*Employers attitudes*

There should be a good deal more research into some specific aspects of employers' attitudes towards employing young women. Is this because they take less well to the modern work environment with its emphasis upon regularity, punctuality,

etc.? If this is so what is the cure? Can some of it be traced back to an education which goes some way towards preparing boys for such work but far less towards preparing girls - rather the end state for them is still as home life and traditional work. Is it because of having to pay such fringe benefits as maternity grants, and if so, could a system be devised whereby all firms, not just those employing women, had to contribute to these so that a firm was not penalized for employing a greater number of women? Or is it such things as having time off for pregnancies or because girls leave when they get married? Even in developed countries these are emotional subjects and would therefore particularly benefit from having further objective information obtained from surveys and studies.

*Boys:  
preferential  
treatment*

In agriculture, trading, crafts and other skills, as well as in the modern sector, the chances are that, if boys continue to be treated preferentially, better trained and given better general preparation for a more productive economic life, the gap between the opportunities for young women and young men will continue to widen. Many people concerned seem to regard this as being almost inevitable, since they maintain that concentration upon better opportunities for young girls must await the time when the employment problems for young men have been solved; and that to increase female participation in the labour market before that time will only increase net un - and under-employment and perhaps even low average family wages as women are employed in preference to men because they will accept lower wages. There are several objections to this point of view and a need for much greater research and analysis of the processes involved. Firstly, that the raising of the productivity of young women in traditional 'female' occupations, through better access to education, better specialized training, better organisation of domestic duties, does not represent a threat to any of the 'men's' jobs. Secondly, that if women were better organised and made more aware of the opportunities available to them they might begin not to accept lower wages. If this were so there would be less of a case for discriminating against one whole sex so that the other sex's job interests

*False basis*

were safeguarded. Further, the argument that child care, etc. would suffer carries less weight if there are better child care, etc. facilities and if young men eventually be persuaded that they have responsibilities in this direction too. Lastly, and perhaps the area where research is most urgently needed, is it indeed inevitable that an increase in male unemployment will follow from increased female participation? Boserup (9) thinks not. She maintains that if the rural areas and rural occupations could be made more attractive to both young men and young women, far fewer of these would migrate to the towns. In that event more of the urban jobs could be undertaken by young urban women - provided, of course, that they had been suitably trained. The effect might even work the other way, in that if more urban girls could get more of the urban jobs there would be fewer available for rural migrants and this might serve to stem the flood from the country to the town a little. Boserup puts these ideas forward as untested propositions but surely there is every reason for carrying out studies in order to test them, as, if the general mechanism is correct, improving girls' opportunities in both rural and urban areas will be seen to be a way of increasing overall national productivity, and this will therefore constitute a most damning argument against those who believe - who want to believe? - that the problem of employment of young women is one which must wait until that of the employment of young men is solved.

#### References in Section 4

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2. "Youth and Development in Africa", op.cit., p.54.
3. The ILO Kenya Report, p. 426.
4. UN Commission on the Status of Women, "Participation of women in the economic and social development of their countries". Report of the Secretary-General, UN, New York, 1970. Questionnaire replies from the Nigerian and Tanzanian governments.
5. Ibid. Reply of the Zambian government.
6. Easter Boserup: "Women's Role in Economic Development", London, 1970, pp.123-125.

- 7 A. Callaway: "Nigerian Enterprise and the Employment of Youth", op. cit., pp. 14-15.
8. Ibid., pp.22-23, and K. Little: "African Women in Towns", C.U.P. 1973, p.34.
9. op. cit., Ch.11 "The Unemployment Scare".