

# **GENDER DISPARITIES IN THE KENYAN LABOUR MARKET: IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY REDUCTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Parts one and two of this paper deal with conceptual issues and focus on gender mainstreaming into investment activities for increased women's employment and poverty reduction. The central argument here is that the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into investment activities is necessarily a long-term process which involves the integration of gender issues in all national and sectoral policies and programmes. The key to gender mainstreaming is to make the process a collective responsibility. Some of the essential steps in this process are the production of gender disaggregated data, the establishment and strengthening of gender management systems, the commitment of senior management personnel to the goal of gender equality as a reflection of attitudinal and behaviour change at personal and institutional levels.

The discussion in part three brings to the fore the issue of women's education and training. Available data show gender and regional disparities in education and training at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. These data indicate women's limited access to formal education and lower adult literacy rates which undermine their capacity to participate in the formal and informal labour market on an equal basis with men. Part four shows the link between women's education, employment and poverty reduction.

The analysis of gender participation in different sectors of the economy revealed some important patterns and trends. These include the fact that female labour force participation in the modern sector has remained below 30% over the last several years compared to men who hold a disproportionately larger share of the modern sector jobs. The majority of women are employed in the education and informal sectors. Those who work in the agricultural sector are usually engaged as casuals. Women's overall lower level of education, limited skills, and access to productive resources, heavy domestic workload, cultural attitudes and segregation of the labour market are some of the factors associated with their limited participation in the modern sector.

Gender representation in the Kenyan civil service also shows gross under-representation of women in top management and policy-making positions. This gender disparity calls for an Affirmative and/or Positive Action to deal not only with increasing women's participation in public and private sector institutions at all levels but also address the twin issue of women's entitlements and cultural barriers which are at the root of their poverty and powerlessness. The low budgetary allocations to women's programmes also reflect lack of political will, improper targeting and non-involvement of women in priority setting.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities in employment opportunities and economic investment patterns in Kenya have continued to widen across all sectors of the economy and at various levels of development intervention. This trend has led to increased unemployment, under-employment, poverty and powerlessness among many Kenyan women. Part of the reason for the persistent inequity is the slow process of mainstreaming gender into employment creation and poverty eradication policies, programmes and strategies in a coordinated, multi-sectoral and crosscutting way. The other reason relates to the existence of social, cultural and structural barriers to effective female participation in the labour force. These and other factors have jointly contributed to the low pay and productivity of women's labour and to their continued under-representation in senior management positions within the public and private sectors.

Although Kenyan women have joined the labour force in large and increasing numbers over the last two decades due to increased access to education, the majority of them are still concentrated in traditional "female occupations" and the informal sector. The urban labour force participation rate for women in Kenya has increased from 30% in the early eighties to 56% in 1995. Despite their growing participation in the workforce, there are still very few women in the top echelons of public decision and policy making positions in Kenya. Most women in Kenya are concentrated in low paying, low status occupations with poor fringe benefits and carried out under poor working conditions and therefore hold very little prospect for poverty reduction and upward mobility. On the other hand, the majority of the women in the rural areas spend a great deal of time on low productivity work which has created major income disparities between men and women.

The reasons for gender disparities in employment opportunities include segregation in the labour market, social attitudes towards women, inadequate capacity on the part of women in terms of their knowledge and skills and lack of gender responsive policies and programmes.

## 1. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

### 1.1 THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

Over the past two and a half decades of active gender debate, there have been major shifts in conceptual language which have led to a growing practice of using the term gender as a substitution for the word woman. Gender does not refer to women or men as is usually misconceived. On the contrary, the concept of gender refers to the relationship between men and women, the ways in which the roles of men and women are socially constructed and to the cultural interpretations of the biological differences between men and women. Gender

roles, relations and identity are socially constructed through the process of socialization. Gender is therefore an inclusive concept which not only entails what men and women do in society and how they relate socially but also embraces cultural ideas about “maleness” and “femaleness” and the structural inequalities which emanate from those differences (Commonwealth 1995: 14; Stolen 1991).

Based on this conceptual understanding of gender, gender relations therefore constitute the framework for the analysis of investments for employment creation and poverty eradication in this paper.

## 1.2 A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

All the sectoral analyses in this paper have been carried out from a gender perspective. This perspective focuses not only on the differential opportunities available to men and women but also on the inequalities and inequities which follow from those differences and calls for appropriate gender planning and mainstreaming to address them.

A gender perspective does not look at the situation of women alone but at the conditions of, and relationship between, men and women as well as how these relationships are structured along gender lines (Brettel and Sargent 1993). The basic concern of a gender perspective which informs these analyses is to identify the level of male and female participation in the labour market, the specific concerns and needs of men and women, the differential impact of investment policies and programmes on men and women, the need for appropriate gender planning and the process of gender mainstreaming. Thus, a gender perspective is not only relational but holistic and transformational as well.

## 1.3 THE VALUE OF GENDER ANALYSIS

Gender analysis is a technique used by researchers, policy makers and development planners and practitioners to provide information on men’s and women’s activity profiles and resource allocations in different sectors of the economy and at different levels. By focusing on gender differences in role and resource allocations, gender analysis attempts to highlight the key differences between men and women in terms of opportunities, incentives and constraints. The central focus of the analysis is on gender differences in access to and control over resources and the differential impact on the lives of men and women.

The data obtained from gender analysis will help in the formulation of appropriate gender responsive policies, programmes and projects which will address the specific needs of poor men and women with a view to eradicating poverty.

## 2. HOW TO MAINSTREAM GENDER IN EMPLOYMENT CREATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The Mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective into all sectors of the economy and policy areas is a long-term process which involves the integration of gender concerns and perspectives into the design, implementation and evaluation of employment and investment policies, programmes and projects. Gender mainstreaming requires gender analysis skills and the production of accurate and up-to-date gender disaggregated data showing not only the contributions of men and women in different sector of the economy but also their constraints and the priority areas for priority attention during planned interventions.

One of the first steps in gender mainstreaming is for the Government of Kenya to strengthen institutional capacity by setting up gender management systems, elevating the Women's Bureau to a higher structure than a mere unit within a Ministry with adequate resources, and establishing gender focal points.

The establishment and strengthening of gender Management Systems as well as focal points with enhanced capabilities are significant steps in the process of gender mainstreaming. This approach aims to mainstream gender into national and sectoral policies, plans and programmes. The integration of gender issues in all national and sectoral policies, plans and programmes will not only increase capacity in gender training and gender management within organizations but also ensure that gender impact assessments and gender policy appraisals are conducted routinely to detect any harmful effects of policies and programmes on men and women.

Another important step in gender mainstreaming is to have senior management personnel who deal with policy formulation and resource allocation committed to the goal of gender equality. This means that recruitment procedures and promotion systems in public and private sector institutions should be established to promote gender equality. As part of this strategy, all staffing advertisements should indicate that the organization which has advertised the position is an equal opportunity employer. Every organization should also have a gender policy and ensure that women's priorities receive equal consideration. This way, gender mainstreaming then becomes part of a change process in the institutional culture and practice.

The institutional commitment to mainstreaming gender equality should also be reflected in the behaviour and attitudes of the organization's senior management staff, starting from the highest possible level. This is where the leadership and the primary responsibility for gender mainstreaming reside although all levels of staff should have the capacity to mainstream gender as a collective institutional responsibility. Effective information flow is also essential for gender mainstreaming.

Although gender mainstreaming is a shared responsibility which is undertaken through a partnership between public and private sector institutions,

civil society organizations, women's organizations, community based organizations (CBOs) and other actors, the senior management staff in all the institutions should ensure that the gender concerns are incorporated in all employment policy areas and permeate all poverty eradication programmes. In order to do this, all institutions and employment sectors should improve their data collection and analysis skills so as to generate gender disaggregated data showing the contributions of men and women in all sectors of the national economy, including their participation in the informal sector. This kind of data allow for a baseline understanding of socio-economic and gender issues on a sector-by-sector basis and also helps with proper targeting when appropriate investments are made. Gender disaggregated data will also improve the measurements of women's unemployment and underemployment in the formal sector as well as their labour contributions as unpaid family workers (UN 1996).

Some of the data that should be generated through this process include gender roles and time-use schedules, basic, practical and strategic gender needs, gender access to and control over income and other resources, gender participation in the decision-making process and its effect on economic production and social reproduction. Gender-specific data will, for example, reveal the proportion of men and women living in poverty, identify their priority needs and the kinds of social and economic investments that may be considered appropriate for their situations. Gender disaggregated data are therefore essential resources for gender-responsive planning and programming which seek to bring to an end the continuing social, cultural, economic and political marginalization of women so that they can move out of poverty.

The engendering of poverty eradication efforts in Kenya therefore requires careful documentation of women and men's labour market participation, wage levels, as well as an understanding of the qualitative dimensions of poverty such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence, among others. Economic investments which only emphasize income-generation for women are in themselves necessary but not sufficient for poverty eradication.

Coordination is an important aspect of gender mainstreaming. Although the overall responsibility for gender mainstreaming is collective and institutional, each organization should set up a *Gender Focal Point*. The primary responsibility of the *Gender Focal Point* would be to coordinate and facilitate gender mainstreaming activities as well as to share information within and between organizations in a catalytic fashion. Focal points for gender planning should be established in all Ministries and key departments. All the officers in charge of focal points should be Senior Staff and should be trained in gender planning (Commonwealth 1995).

In order to be more effective as change agents within their organizations, officers in charge of *Gender Focal Points* should be trained in gender planning and gender analysis skills, leadership skills, communication skills, advocacy and other relevant skills to enhance their capacity. While the training needs for each *Gender Focal Point* may vary from time to time and from one organization to another, training and capacity development for gender mainstreaming must

always remain an on-going process, and a collective responsibility incorporating new skills as may be required by changes in the labour market and emerging priorities (UNDP 1997).

### 3. GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN KENYA

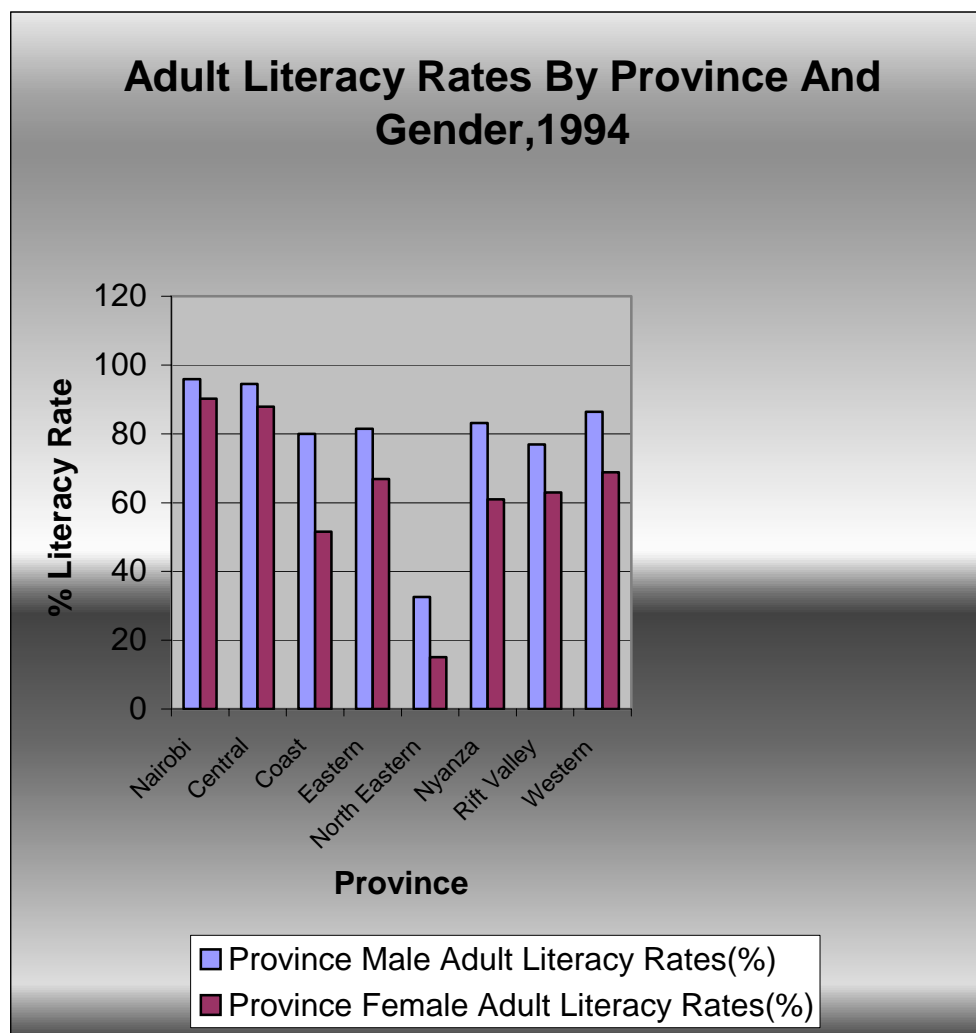
Education plays a key role in sustainable human development and contributes to the empowerment of individuals and groups to improve the quality of their lives. The government of Kenya has, since independence, set the goal of achieving universal access to primary education by the year 2000 although this target has always remained elusive.

Although Kenya's education policy does not discriminate on the basis of gender, it is essentially gender-neutral in outlook and the education system is characterized by significant gender disparities (Republic of Kenya 1999a). At the national level, boys and girls have almost achieved equal access to primary education in terms of enrolment although the completion rates show that slightly more boys than girls complete primary education. In 1995, for example, 43 % of the boys completed their primary education compared to 42.1 % of the girls in the same cohort. Data from the provinces show that completion rates for girls is highest in Nairobi and much lower than that of boys in North Eastern and Nyanza provinces. Although the enrolment of girls and women in secondary and tertiary education has increased considerably over the last 2 – 3 decades, the overall participation rates show that boys and men have consistently had more access to education at every level than their female counterparts. In general, girls tend to have limited access to education and drop out more frequently than boys.

As a result, the female enrolment in institutions of higher learning has always been lower than that of men. One example is the undergraduate enrolment in all the public universities in Kenya. During the 1992/93 academic year, for example, female students comprised only 27 % of the total student enrolment in public universities. The Government of Kenya has, in recent years, implemented some policy measures to increase women's access to education and narrow the existing gender gap in public universities. One such policy is the Affirmative Action which has lowered the Public University entry requirement for female students by one point. But gender disparities at the tertiary level still remain large despite such policy interventions.

Women's limited access to education, particularly the high drop-out rate among women at upper-primary, secondary and tertiary levels is attributed to several factors. These factors include teenage pregnancies, early marriages, social attitudes towards women, cultural practices, inadequate and gender-biased curriculum and teaching materials, family preferences to educate boys, sexual harassment and heavy domestic workload for the girl child. Other contributing factors include cost-sharing arrangements prompted by Structural Adjustment

Programmes, reductions in government expenditure in education, inadequate facilities in public girls' schools and worsening poverty (Republic of Kenya 1999b). These and other factors have also contributed to the concentration of girls and women in a limited range of fields and their subsequent under-representation in traditionally male-dominated professions. (Jacobs 1994).



**Figure 1.** Adult Literacy Rates by Province and Gender, 1994 (Women's Bureau 1999)

Until the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in the mid 1980's, science curricula and teaching materials in Kenya were gender-biased and insensitive to the specific needs of women. The curricula basically reinforced traditional gender roles and denied women the technical skills and knowledge which they need to enhance their employment opportunities and improve their lives. This system also denied women equal access to career development in technical fields and the opportunity to participate more actively and effectively in the competitive labour market.

Adult literacy for women has also continued to lag behind that of men despite concerted efforts to bridge the gender gap in learning and continuing education. Figure 1 shows that adult literacy levels for women are consistently

lower than those of men throughout the country although there are regional variations. The lowest levels (15%) are in North Eastern and Coast Provinces. Cultural traditions which define the role and status of women as well as limited access to social services in these areas are among the contributing factors.

The government, in collaboration with employers, workers and trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations as well as private sector educational institutions should develop educational and training programmes for unemployed women and those in the labour force to acquire the skills which are relevant to a changing labour market situation.

The private sector, the churches, the NGOs, and other actors have played a key complementary role in improving women's access to education and training opportunities through increased investment in private schools and training institutions although most of these services are in the urban areas and mainly accessible to more affluent social groups. This means that a large proportion of the female population from poor families will continue to be uneducated and unskilled even though education and training in Kenya has always been financed through a partnership between the government, the private sector, parents, donors and NGOS.

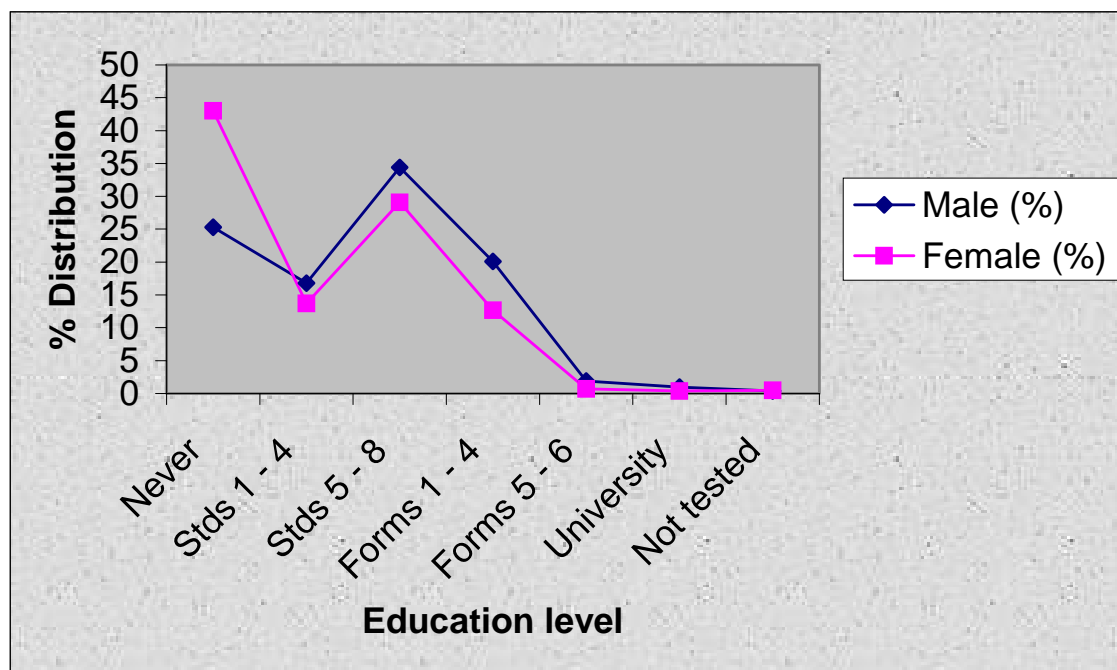
#### 4. THE LINK BETWEEN WOMEN'S EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

A common argument that "when you educate a man you educate an individual and when you educate a woman you educate a nation" basically refers to the high social and economic returns of a woman's education which transcend herself and her family into the wider community by empowering other people. Studies have shown that investing in women's education at all levels contributes significantly to the overall social-economic development through decreased fertility levels, improved nutritional status, child health and education in the family as well as higher labour productivity (Abagi 1999; Republic of Kenya 1996; UNDP 1997).

Women's increased access to educational and training opportunities not only increases their participation in the labour force but also expands the range of occupational options available in the market. The vulnerability of poor women in Kenya, as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, is closely linked to illiteracy and low levels of education.

The 1989 census data indicate that 43% of the female labour force in Kenya had no education compared to 33.7% of the male employees (see figure 2). This indicates higher illiteracy rates for women than men. Most of the uneducated women work in the rural areas, mostly as casual labour in the agricultural sector or in the domestic sector where they often receive minimal wages.





**Figure 2.** Percentage Distribution of the Employed Population by Gender and Level of Education (Kenya Population Census 1999)

Low educational levels, including high levels of illiteracy undermine women’s capacity and their ability to participate in the formal labour market on an equal basis with men.

The Government should intensify its efforts to improve women’s access to educational and training programmes, including vocational training for those who are unemployed in order to provide them with skills and knowledge which can enhance their participation in formal and informal labour markets. In order to do this, the Government together with its development partners in the public and private sectors need to mobilize additional resources and increase funding levels for women’s education at all levels. Between 1980 and 1995, for example, the Government of Kenya expenditure on education accounted for only 7% of the GDP and the bulk of this investment came from the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and the largest share of this expenditure was in primary education (Republic of Kenya 1999c). Some of the major challenges facing the education sector are how to mobilize resources to finance education, how to manage the available resources efficiently and effectively and how to achieve gender parity in education and training in order to reduce female illiteracy, increase women’s participation in employment and reduce poverty.

## 5. WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN KEY SECTORAL ACTIVITIES

The level of gender participation in various sectors of the national economy varies considerably although most of the data is neither complete, accurate, up-

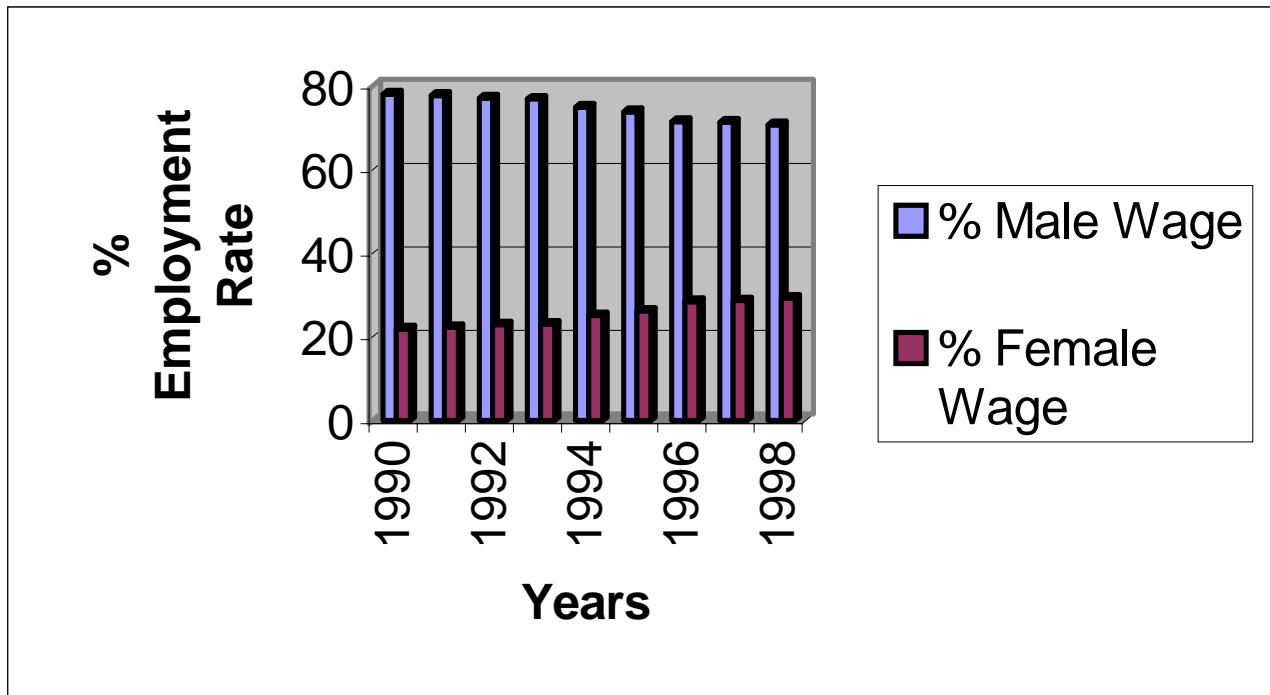
to-date nor disaggregated by gender. All this reflects lack of a gender perspective in data collection and analysis and the tendency to design gender-blind or gender-neutral sectoral policies and programmes which do not address the specific employment issues concerning men and women.

Data from the 1995-1999 Economic Surveys indicate that men are more heavily involved than women in almost all the key sectoral activities. These data also show that between 1996 and 1998 there was insignificant change in the participation of women in the labour force. The level of female wage employment in most sectors remained at around 25% except in the domestic and education sectors where women constitute about 40% of the total labour force. These two are among the sectors which are traditionally considered as female domains. Women's heavy involvement in domestic work and other forms of non-market production often limits their participation in wage sector employment. This is primarily due to the incompatibility between female reproduction roles and modern wage employment.

Female labour force participation increased marginally from 28.7% in 1997 to 29.3% in 1998 due largely to the ongoing economic reforms and slight improvements in female access to education (Republic of Kenya 1999b; 1997). Despite this modest increase, the proportion of female employees in the traditionally male dominated industries has remained disproportionately lower than that of men. For example, the proportion of women employed in building and construction industry declined from 8% in 1996 to 6.3% in 1998 while male participation in this sector increased from 92% to 93.7% over the same period. These are traditionally male dominated sectors where female entry has been fairly restricted.

Although women held more jobs in the education services (40%) and the domestic sector, their wage employment in the modern sector has remained lower than that of men.

Figure 3 shows that female labour force participation in the modern sector has remained below 30% over the last several years. For example, the proportion of female employees in the modern sector increased marginally from 26.2% in 1995 to 29.3% in 2000 while men have continued to hold a disproportionately large share of the modern sector jobs. It is, however, important to note that male participation in modern sector wage employment also decreased from 78.1% in 1990 to 70.7% in 1998 due mainly to the ongoing public sector reforms (Republic of Kenya 2000).



**Figure 3.** Wage Employment in the Modern Sector by Gender, 1990–1998 (Republic of Kenya 1999b)

Rural women in Kenya are among the poorest segments of the national population both in terms of their structural positions in the household and in the market place. In addition to their inadequate access to income earning opportunities and control over productive resources like land, technology, labour and capital, women are also constrained by cultural barriers and stereotypes as well as being overburdened by multiple roles constrained by cultural barriers and stereotypes as well as being overburdened by multiple roles.

Examples of cultural barriers and stereotypes which impede women's involvement in wage employment and other economic activities abound. They include teenage pregnancy, early marriage and female circumcision which lead to high drop-out rates among girls. Such interruptions in girls' education which are also linked to the preference in some cultures to educate boys rather than girls have adversely affected female labour force participation. Women's overall lower level of education, lack of skills, heavy domestic workload and cultural stereotypes has tended to limit women's participation in the modern wage sector.

Although a large number of women have entered the labour force over the last two decades they are mainly concentrated in low-status, low paying occupations such as teaching, nursing, secretarial work and domestic services. Some of the jobs held by women are viewed as extensions of their traditional roles. These perceptions about the suitability of men and women for particular types of jobs restrict or exclude most women from entering higher-status, more

lucrative fields of employment as well as senior political and management positions.

The prevalence of gender segregation in the labour market has created a major barrier to the expansion of women's employment opportunities leading to a skewed employment pattern in which women are under-represented in the modern wage sector with decreasing incomes. Gender stereotyping of jobs is another major barrier to the expansion of women's employment opportunities leading to gender segmentation of the labour market (Suda 1991; Anker and Knowles 1986).

Allowing women wider occupational choices would not only put to productive use the talent and potential of half the nation's population but would also help Kenyan women become more fulfilled and self-sufficient. From an efficiency standpoint, the full participation of women in the labour market is good for social and economic development. Women's heavy involvement in domestic work and other forms of non-market production often limits their participation in the modern sector employment primarily because of the incompatibility between reproductive roles at home and wage employment outside the home.

One of the ways to overcome some of these cultural constraints facing women in the modern sector employment, particularly working mothers, is to put in place programmes which can enable them to reconcile their family responsibilities with market work. The provision of quality and affordable childcare services would be one line of intervention. Employers can provide decent child care services such as day care centres within their organizations to mothers who need them. Another area of policy action would be for the Government to encourage part-time work or flexible work schedules for female employees who are breast-feeding. In addition, there is need for fundamental attitudinal changes on the part of both men and women to allow men share domestic responsibilities with women. All these changes can be initiated through civic education and gender awareness campaigns jointly organized by public sector institutions, NGOs, women advocacy groups and other civil society organizations in an effort to challenge the existing stereotypes about women.

## 6. GENDER REPRESENTATION IN WAGE EMPLOYMENT IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The agricultural sector can provide a strong base for economic growth, employment creation and poverty reduction in Kenya if proper investment strategies are designed and implemented. About 80% of the women in Kenya live and work in the rural areas. Although farming is the major economic activity and the main source of income for the Kenyan rural population, women

contribute about 71% of the agricultural labour, especially in small scale subsistence production.

The proportion of female wage employees in the agricultural sector only rose from 23.3% in 1994 to 24.8% in 1998 (Olum 1999). The low female participation rate in agriculture indicates that most women are confined to the production of subsistence crops while cash crop production remains predominantly a male responsibility. During the same period (1995-1998), Kenyan women accounted for less than 25% of all wage employees in the agricultural sector despite the fact that the bulk of the rural Kenyan population is female. This low wage employment rate in agriculture points to the fact that much of the female labour contribution in agriculture is unpaid and not reflected in the national statistics.

Most of the women who work in commercial agriculture are usually engaged as casual labourers for very low wages. In order to raise the level of female participation in agricultural sector and their incomes, rural investment and employment strategies should target women and pay greater attention to their enterprises, including an assessment of how the new investments and employment strategies will impact their roles and status both in the short and long term.

## 7. GENDER PARTICIPATION IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The total number of people employed in all sectors of the Kenyan economy increased marginally from 4.7 million in 1997 to 5.1 in 1998. Most of the jobs were in the expanding informal sector. Employment in the informal sector expanded from about 2.2 million people in 1995 to 3.4 million in 1998. This expansion points to the significant role that the informal sector has continued to play in job creation, particularly at a time when formal sector employment is steadily decelerating due mainly to the ongoing public sector reforms.

One of the problems with data on the informal sector employment is that they are not disaggregated by gender. However, about 52% of the workers in the informal sector were self-employed female entrepreneurs who had set up their own business enterprises in the rural and urban areas. A further 66.5% of the women in the sector were engaged as unpaid family workers compared to 33.5% of their male counterparts.

The over-representation of women in the informal sector is variously explained by the inability of the formal sector to generate enough jobs to absorb a large and increasing labour force, the use of simple technologies, women's inadequate education and skills training, ease of entry and exist, low capital investment and the relative compatibility between informal sector employment and household work, among other factors.

Although the informal sector has a tremendous potential for employment creation and have some businesses which have been developed into sustainable private enterprises, most female workers in the sector continue to experience

several challenges. Among the major constraints facing women in the informal sector are limited access to credit facilities, inadequate education and skills training, registration and licensing, inability to pay rent and operate in authorized premises, lack of proper organizational structure, and inadequate access to markets for their products. In view of these constraints coupled with other social and cultural barriers to women's empowerment, many of the activities in the informal sector do not generate enough income to reduce female poverty. Most of the urban poor in Kenya are in the informal sector and the majority of them are women.

In order to accelerate entry into the informal sector and generate jobs that can reduce poverty, the government, in collaboration with other development partners, should put in place a legal framework and regulatory mechanisms to promote the role of the informal sector in employment creation as articulated in a number of government policy documents such as the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986, and the report of the Presidential Committee on Employment of 1991. In addition to these kinds of policy review, increased access to credit facilities to women entrepreneurs and proper targeting of the types of informal sector activities operated by women is one of the strategies to reduce poverty.

With regards to increasing access to credit facilities for female entrepreneurs, there have been a number of initiatives in the recent past. For example, several commercial banks and other formal financial institutions have been working closely with the Government and have set up special credit schemes which target small-scale entrepreneurs. This scheme targets individual female entrepreneurs or groups of business women operating small but viable enterprises in urban and rural areas on a full-time basis (Republic of Kenya 1999c). Other NGOs such as FAULU Kenya, Kenya Rural Enterprise Programme (K-REP) and the Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) have also established credit schemes for small-scale entrepreneurs without the requirements of a tangible collateral. The credits are provided to the groups only on the basis of social collateral.

## 8. GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Although Kenyan women are gradually joining the civil service and making significant strides to develop careers in the previously male-dominated professions, they are still grossly under-represented in senior management and public decision-making positions. In 1995, for example, women held less than 6% of the senior positions in Job Group P and above compared to 24.3% of those in Job Groups A-G.

Available data also show that male representation in top management and policy-making positions in the civil service is disproportionately higher than that of females in almost all the ranks. This trend has changed little over the years and the pattern that has emerged is one in which the higher one looks at the civil

service hierarchy, the fewer women one sees. In 1998, for example, Kenya had only four women permanent secretaries out of a total of thirty, representing only 13.3% of the total establishment. In the same year, there were 38 women Assistant Secretaries Grade III compared to 60 of their male counterparts. Overall, women comprise less than 25% of the Senior Civil Servants in Kenya. This under-representation underlines their minority status in policy-making management positions.

There is need for an Affirmative Action to eliminate gender imbalance in the Kenyan Civil Service, particularly at the upper echelons of power and privilege. This gender disparity is pervasive in all the other sectors within the civil service, including the Judiciary. Women judges are a distinct minority in Kenya. Over 30% of women in the judiciary are magistrates.

The limited participation of women in the public sector employment at top management levels is linked to a range of social, cultural, political and economic factors. These include women's limited opportunities such as illiteracy and low educational levels, their concentration in unpaid household work, the public's perception of women's management abilities, lack of the necessary skills required by the modern labour market and cultural ideologies which prescribe appropriate gender roles. The other factors associated with the prevailing gender bias in the formal sector employment are women's limited control over productive resources and limited participation in political and economic institutions (Beneria and Bisnath 1996). These limitations have led to growing gender inequalities in access to and distribution of employment opportunities, income and power. These cultural and institutional biases have, in fact, contributed to the prevalence of structural poverty among women.

It is therefore critical that gender sensitive poverty eradication strategies and policies should not only focus on increasing women's access to employment opportunities and their representation in the labour market at various levels of the hierarchy but also address the twin issues of women's entitlements and capabilities as well as eradicate the institutional barriers and biases which are at the root of women's concentration in low-paying, low status jobs. It is also essential that public policies focus on cultural and structural changes that can secure more equitable distribution of resources and employment opportunities between men and women to eradicate poverty. However, poverty eradication cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty investment programmes alone. It will also require democratic participation and fundamental changes in the political and economic management structures in order to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities (UN 1996; UNDP 1997).

## 9. GOVERNMENT BUDGETARY ALLOCATIONS TO WOMEN-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

For more than three decades now, the Government of Kenya has allocated small amounts of financial resources from its national budget to programmes and projects which deal directly with issues concerning women. The low budgetary allocations demonstrate lack of commitment on the part of the Kenya Government to improve the overall situation of the women in the country. The data further reveal, that, in most cases, some of the resources which were allocated for women-specific programmes were not spent. This indicates that women's issues have not been given high priority because of lack of political will.

What needs to be done is for the Government to identify the critical issues concerning women and allocate adequate financial resources to programmes and projects dealing with such critical areas of concern. There should also be a monitoring system in place to ensure that the money allocated to women's programmes is spent on the activities identified by the women themselves based on their priorities.

## 10. CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed a number of issues which include a gender analysis of the structure of investment and women's participation in all the key sectors of the Kenyan economy and how to mainstream gender concerns into investment opportunities for poverty reduction. A further concern of this paper was to analyse the importance of investment in education and training for women's economic empowerment as one of the strategies in poverty reduction.

The paper has emphasised the enormous contribution made by Kenyan women in all sectors of the economy and their continued under-representation in senior management positions. This disparity is attributed to a range of factors, including a definite lack of gender – responsive employment policies in Kenya. The paper has also discussed the concept of gender, making the distinction between gender and women. It has argued for the use of a gender perspective as an appropriate framework for gender planning and programming.

### 10.1 SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following suggestions can be made to deal with the twin issues of gender-based labour market segregation and poverty reduction.



### 10.1.1 Partnerships

Given the current magnitude of unemployment, underemployment and poverty in Kenya, it is clear that no organization can deal with these problems alone primarily because the problems are multi sectoral in nature and therefore require a well coordinated and integrated approach. In order to deal more effectively with the problems of unemployment and poverty, multi-sectoral interventions are needed. Such interventions should be more carefully sequenced and targeted to allow for more efficient use of the available resources.

The realization that employment creation and poverty reduction require greater involvement of various actors and substantial social investments presents a strong need for the government to establish and/or strengthen linkages with the private sector, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and other actors. Through such public-private partnerships, each organization can be involved in programme implementation on the basis of expertise and comparative advantage.

Such collaborative efforts should be organized either through parallel funding, backstopping or sub-contacting arrangements and their principal outcomes should include improvements in the working conditions of women in the formal and informal sectors, the upgrading of women's skills and the creation of employment opportunities, including self-employment.

### 10.1.2 Priority setting and proper targeting

A number of employment promotion policies and poverty reduction programmes which have been designed and implemented to assist the poor in Kenya have tended to bypass women essentially because they have not paid sufficient attention to gender division of labour, systems of resource allocation and gendered dimensions of poverty. The bulk of the country's rural population are women who work in the agricultural sector but have limited access to productive resources, resulting in their deprivation, vulnerability, poverty and powerlessness. Urban women in the informal sector are also among the poorest of the poor as a result of the social, cultural and economic constraints. Existing or future investment activities should be implemented to assist men and women who are living in poverty.

In this regard, it is important to develop proper criteria for determining those individuals and groups who are chronically poor, what their needs are and how their capacities can be enhanced. With proper targeting, all the development partners will invest their resources in specific projects and programmes which are likely to have the greatest impact primarily, particularly if the resources are more efficiently utilized.

Given the fact that women are the majority of the rural population and the poor in Kenya and are still mainly concentrated in agriculture and the informal sector, it is important that ongoing poverty reducing employment strategies

target women to promote rural and agricultural development as well as non-farm employment.

### 10.1.3 Linkages and synergy

Gender segregation in the modern sector employment in terms of recruitment, training opportunities and promotion is driving more women into part-time work, the domestic sector and the informal sector.

Although women in the informal sector are faced with a wide range of constraints, most of the small-scale and *Jua Kali* enterprises are more labour intensive and generally less expensive to create than formal sector employment. Because of their differences and complementarity, investment activities in both sectors can be coordinated in such a way that each sector produces what the other consumes. For example, the informal sector can produce the raw materials for the formal sector while also serving as a strategic market. In order to sustain this kind of linkage, the donors and the private sector should accelerate their investment into the informal sector. The government should also create an enabling environment for the promotion of private investments, which have a gender perspective and the potential to create jobs and reduce poverty.

### 10.1.4 Production of gender desegregated data

The absence of gender desegregated data by public and private sector institutions is one of the major constraints to the design and implementation of gender-responsive poverty eradication programmes. There is need to improve gender statistics in all sectors and institutions. Gender desegregated data can be generated through collaborative efforts between, for example, gender researchers in public and private institutions, donors and non-governmental organizations. To be successful, gender-sensitive poverty reducing investment programmes should be based on gender disaggregated data. Without data which are differentiated by gender, planning and social programming can only accentuate the inequalities.

### 10.1.5 Increased investments in the agricultural sector

Gender disparities are very high in almost all sectors of the national economy. Between 1997 and 1998, female labour force participation was less than 25% despite the fact that women comprise the majority of the rural population. Rural women still spend a lot of their time in unpaid family work which limits their participation in income-generating activities despite the proliferation of women groups in the rural and urban areas. This disparity has led to a growing income gap between men and women.

Employment creation and poverty reducing investments should focus on rural development and improvements in the agricultural sector. The government

and other development partners should establish small and medium scale agro-based industries in the rural areas to provide immediate market for agricultural produce. This collective measure should be undertaken as part of a general rural infrastructural development aimed at creating employment opportunities in the rural areas and to reduce rural-urban labour migration. Another strategy for employment creation in the rural areas is to accelerate micro-enterprise development programmes which integrate a gender perspective and takes into account the needs and interests of women at the grassroots level. In collaboration with the NGOs, and other development partners, the government should strengthen the capacity of poor women by expanding their access to credit and land. Organizations such as the Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT), National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK), Maendeleo ya Wanawake and the Women's Bureau, among other women's organizations should play a leading role in setting up gender-sensitive poverty eradication projects and programmes at community, district and national levels. Such investments should be accompanied by sustained advocacy to promote gender equality in employment opportunities.

### 10.1.6 Legal and policy issues

Economic growth and other anti-poverty policies and programmes are necessary but not sufficient conditions for poverty eradication and employment creation. The Government should formulate policies and enact legislation to explicitly outlaw gender discrimination in employment. Such legislation should be gender responsive and should provide for the appointment of women to at least one-third of senior positions in the cabinet and the civil service.

In this regard, there is need for legal and policy measures which promote equal opportunities for men and women through positive and/or affirmative action in all sectors. Thus, all employers in public and private sector institutions should adopt the policy of affirmative action to reserve a certain proportion of post for men and women. At the same time, the law which prohibits women's employment in certain types of work or restricts the times when women can work should be reviewed and repealed.

There is need for a gender responsive legal framework which can address the wide range and types of discriminatory practices which deprive women their full and equal rights and limit their access to education, training, basic services and productive resources. More specifically, there should be laws to address such issues as Maternity leave for working women, paternity leave for husbands, sexual harassment at the workplace, safety at the place of work, house allowance for married women, women's legal access to land, education and training for women and girls, as well as any cultural attitudes and practices which undermine the status of women in the family and society.

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