

# GENDER AND ECONOMIC POLICY IN A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

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## Introduction

In April 1990, approximately 50 economists associated with the ANC and the mass democratic movement met in Harare to discuss the South African economy and policy options in a democratic South Africa. Later, the ANC and COSATU came together and produced policy guidelines for the economy. On both occasions, very few women were invited to participate and there was little, if any, discussion on gender in the papers, while the recommendations did not reflect an understanding that gender oppression is structured into all aspects of South African society, including the economy.

This paper is a contribution to the current debate in South Africa on future economic policy, and is based on the assumption that the debate should involve everyone. The paper is about the economy, but not addressed to economists. In particular, we hope to help empower women to participate in the debate and in policy making. We are not here formulating policy on gender issues, but reflecting on the implications of gender questions in policy formulation on the economy: how the present and future economy would look if one took into account the total population of South Africa - black and white - rather than simply the minority of the population who happen to be male. In doing so, we have drawn on research being done in South Africa and elsewhere on women and gender issues in South Africa, and on the research and experience of women in other countries.

As we have said, this is not simply an academic exercise. In many countries these issues are raised, if at all, within the confines of universities and some women's organizations - and the connection between those raising the issues and those in power is very tenuous. Women in the ANC are determined that this is not going to be the case in South Africa and want to take up what is a unique opportunity to address the question of gender oppression in the course of the fundamental transformation of society that the ANC is proposing. Recognition of institutionalized racism in South Africa has brought with it an appreciation of the necessity of examining all public and private institutions, practices and policies in order to eradicate racism. A similar approach needs to be applied to eliminate sexism.

Since the last ANC Women's Section Conference in 1987, serious consideration has been given to the question of gender oppression, and policy has been developed through discussion at a number of internal seminars attended by all ANC structures and departments. The ANC's overall policy has now been set out in the Statement of the National Executive Committee on the Emancipation of Women, dated 2 May 1990. However, as yet this is not reflected in other policies such as that on the economy, even though the relevant departments have participated in the seminars.

There are some parts of this Statement that are of particular significance for the subject under consideration. For the ANC now, the question of the emancipation of women is an issue that has to be addressed in its own right. Contrary to the oft-expressed view that raising the issue at this stage of the liberation struggle is divisive, the ANC states that the failure to deal with the question hitherto has been to the detriment of the struggle. This will have to be taken into account in future policy formulation.

The use of the words "gender oppression" is significant. The word "sex" is a biological definition; "gender" is a socially constructed understanding of what it is to be a man and

what it is to be a woman, with defined characteristics which are encompassed in the notion of femininity and masculinity. We need to be aware that "men's role" and "women's role" in the economy and in most of society are not biologically determined (apart from pregnancy and childbirth), but are culturally allocated, and the relationship between the two is not one of equality but of oppression.

Most important is the way in which gender oppression is defined in the ANC statement. For it makes clear that what has to be addressed is not simply discrimination against women in the laws of the land, but a form of oppression that is structured within society and has shaped its institutions, including the economy. We cannot then place gender issues in a separate box, examine them separately and formulate a policy on gender that is isolated from other policy. Rather, policy on gender has to permeate all other policies. The statement says:

Gender oppression is everywhere rooted in a material base and is expressed in socio-cultural traditions and attitudes all of which are supported and perpetuated by an ideology which subordinates women. In South Africa it is institutionalized in the laws as well as the customs and practices of all our people. Within our racially and ethnically divided society, all women have a lower status than men of the same group in both law and practice. And as with racism the disadvantages imposed on them range across the political economic, social, domestic, cultural and civil spheres.

In addition, new economic policies must benefit women. This may be so self-evident a statement as to appear unnecessary. Yet, it needs to be stressed, for experience in other countries has shown that periods of rapid structural change have frequently worked to the detriment of women. This does not refer only to structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF - though the democratic South Africa must be alert to the dangers. It is also that even otherwise progressive measures, taken in isolation and without addressing some of the issues raised here, will not help women. As we shall show, without simultaneous action that will relieve women of their existing tasks in what we will here call the hidden parts of the economy, women will find that new, apparently progressive policies have not eased their lives but have added to their workload, to the extent that it becomes more difficult for them to participate in the economic and political changes.

The NEC Statement further explains:

The manipulation of gender relations has been an important feature of state control over especially the African people and the effects have impinged most harshly upon women. Their mobility has been rigidly controlled, and the unpaid labour of African women in the rural areas has underpinned the migrant labour system and subsidised the profits of the mining industry. Within apartheid ideology, African women have been perceived simply as the breeders of future generations of labour. With the creation of the Bantustans large numbers have been confined to deteriorating rural environments, dependent on the commitment of absent breadwinners for small cash remittances. Many have been made the sole minders of the elderly, the disabled and the children. Women have carried the main load of responsibility for survival and generational reproduction even though they are often still subject to the legal authority of absent men who are removed from day to day decision making. Centuries of

women's subjugation have deprived and marginalised them in different ways. Nationally, women have the lowest levels of health, education and skills. The majority still bear the sole burden of domestic labour. Their contribution to the creation of our country's wealth is unrecognised and mostly unpaid. Women make up the majority of the unemployed, while those in waged work are channelled into the worst paid lowest status jobs. Even white, but especially black women do not participate fully in the decision and policy making organs of our country.

Therein lies the crux. In a truly democratic society no group can simply be the recipient of good policies - the victims, as it were, of the benevolence of others. New policy must not be concerned simply with the allocation of resources to women. If democracy is to have meaning and to endure, then it is crucial that not only are women able to control resources on an equal basis, but also that they participate in making decisions about the allocation of resources. At all levels, women have to be fully involved in the formulation of policy as well as its implementation. As we shall see, this raises issues that go beyond the political institutions, and concern the way in which the economy is to be organized, run, and controlled.

The next years are going to be a period of major structural change in South Africa. The economy, as much as anything else, is going to undergo major changes which will put it under stress and create tensions. So the analyses and recommendations which follow have been written with these circumstances very much in mind. Whatever happens in the economy, times will not be easy. It is also, of course, the case that such a period of change presents a major opportunity for women, and this paper is written in the hope that it can help that opportunity to be grasped. For the evidence of history has unfortunately been that, although women have played major roles in the struggles to open up the possibility of fundamental change, the pressures of the times and the lack of consciousness of the issues to be faced have meant that too often they have lost out and their specific interests have been forgotten in the new societies they have helped to create.

### *Some Principles*

There are a number of principles which underlie all the discussion which follows, and which it is important to clarify before we go any further.

FIRST, the question at issue here is gender oppression, and not only discrimination. Taking gender seriously means more than legislation and other action to combat discrimination against women. It means designing policies, across the whole range of policy-areas, which actively seek to undermine the structures of oppression of one sex by the other. For discrimination is really more a symptom than a cause; it is a product of the whole way in which society works. To attack it, then, we have not only to legislate and act against it itself but also to work for shifts in the deeper causes which underlie it. As the ANC-NEC Statement says, "To achieve genuine equality, our policies must be based on a real understanding of **gender oppression** and the way it manifests itself in our society" [our emphasis].

It is important, then, to be clear what we mean by terms such as gender oppression. The introduction of this paper argued that while 'sex' is a biological category, 'gender' refers to our socially-constructed understandings of what it is to be a woman or to be a man. We derive these understandings from the way society is organized and from the way in which we experience it. Our argument, then, is that if gender oppression is socially constructed, we must examine, and aim to change, the social relations which construct it. Our aim must be to reform gender relations so that they exist on a more equitable foundation and

provide the basis for the full and free development of both men and women.

It is especially important to emphasise this in the context of a discussion about the economy, because framing the debate in terms of social relations can sometimes give the impression that the issue must be one of social, rather than economic, policy. This is not so. The economy is not a machine; it is constituted out of social relations and many of those social relations are oppressive to women. It is these social relations within the economy and which form part of the basis of gender oppression which must be changed. And this must be done through policies towards the economy.

An example may help make this point clearer and also help clarify the distinction between discrimination and gender oppression. One of the greatest needs of the economy of a democratic South Africa will be for a workforce with much higher levels of skills. Training will therefore be of the utmost importance. And an economic policy which takes gender seriously must give equal priority to the training of women.

But what does this mean? There are examples from all over the world in which attempts have been made to increase the participation of women on training courses. Great efforts have often been made to ensure that there is no discrimination against their entry. Yet, the response of women has often been "disappointing". They have not joined the courses in large numbers. The reason is usually not explicit or implicit **discrimination** but the day-to-day relations between women and men, which operate to exclude women and to penalize those who try to break down barriers. Women knew all too well what they might have to put up with from men on the course. And they feared competing against them and losing; they also equally feared competing against them and winning. It is **the structure of gender relations** which here forms the barrier to women's wider participation in (and greater usefulness to) the economy. Just trying to end discrimination between already socially constructed women and men did not address the fundamental problem. Clearly, in this example, other policies have to be devised, such as courses for women only, to lessen the conflicts women experience in training.

Moreover, it is not just the economy itself, but also some of the ways in which most economists habitually think about it, which underlie gender oppression. Taking gender seriously in economic policy, we would argue, presents challenges to some of our commonly accepted ways of thinking and holds up to question some of our accepted definitions and assumptions. We shall be examining some examples of this later in the paper. As we shall discover, many economists, and ways of economic thinking, have a disconcerting habit of both seeing and not seeing women and the functional role which women play in any economy in any society.

SECOND, over and over again in the discussion which follows we shall find ourselves confronted by what we call "the eternal dilemma". It is this. On the one hand, we need to design policies which will improve the position of women in the places where they are at the moment. Thus, for example, at the moment in the South African economy women do the greatest proportion of domestic labour; they do most of the work of taking care of the children; they are a high proportion of workers in low-paid jobs and the majority of the work-force in certain industrial sectors - clothing, food, and some kinds of farming would be examples. An urgent priority must be to design and implement policies which will improve women's lot within these parts of the economy.

On the other hand, however, we need to challenge the fact that women do certain kinds of work and men do others. We need to change the structures which maintain the sexual division of labour in the economy. In other words, at the same time as trying to improve the condition of women in the places where they are in the economy, we need to make sure that in the longer run they do not remain where they are.

Any individual policy will probably be directed more towards one of these aims than towards the other. It is therefore necessary for any overall economic strategy to include a bundle of complementary policies in order fully to address both sides of this issue. Only in that way can the dilemma be overcome.

THIRD, there is an important element of this whole discussion which is about control and about democracy. Taking gender seriously means that the issues involved go far beyond those of distribution, although those are, of course, important. Even more fundamental are issues of control and of decision-making. Indeed, if real democracy is to have meaning, it must be about people's access not just to resources but to the structures of decision-making and of power which determine the size and the distribution of those resources. An important aspect of any economic policy must therefore be its attention to forms of social organization, access to decision-making, and the position of women in relation to these.

There are two issues here, each of which must be addressed in its own right. These are the issues of control, on the one hand, and the structures of decision-making, on the other. From the organization of the central state to the degree of its devolution, to the local face-to-face provision and organization of social services, both of these issues have to be confronted. If this human infrastructure of the economy is to be democratic, it needs within it the equal participation of women. And if women are to benefit from the new economy of a democratic South Africa, it is essential that they participate fully in the structures of control and decision-making. In a very real way, these issues are about giving women access to power, and about women taking power, too, for little of this will really happen unless women themselves are organized and struggle for these kinds of changes. Not taking these issues seriously means that women will remain second-class citizens.

### *From Principles to Policy: understanding the vanishing trick*

How do we translate these principles, which we have just set out, into practice in economic policy-making? To explain our approach to this, it seems a good idea to start by examining where it is in economic debates that women disappear: how it is that, as we put it, economic policy-makers can "see and not see" women's work and women's economic needs.

We can illustrate the problem with the following quotation, from the report of the Workshop referred to above, on Economic Policy for a Post Apartheid South Africa, held in Harare in April/May 1990. The quotation is from the working group reports, from the group on Gender Issues:

A democratic South African state will strive to ensure that any new economic policy will have as an important policy objective **the rapid, successful integration of women into economic activity** and the related redefinition of the roles of women and men in a new society. [Our emphasis]

We use this quotation merely to illustrate how persistent is the idea that women are not in some way already integrated into economic activity, do not already work, are not already producers. The idea that the problem women face is their lack of integration into the economy - as opposed to the form of that integration - has a very long history in all types of economic thought. However, the idea is wrong. One central aim of this paper is to explain why it is wrong, by examining the form of women's integration into economic activity, in order to construct a better basis for policy-making.

So where do women vanish when the economy is analysed? They vanish into three largely unexplored gaps in analysis which many people scarcely notice.

The first "gap" is "the family", or, as it is usually called in economic analysis, "the household" or sometimes "the domestic unit". This is a curious unit, usually understood as a hierarchy with an adult male "head" where one can be found. It is frequently also conceived as a world of wholly pooled resources, of wholly common interests expressed by the male household head. It may be admitted (usually as a "problem") that some households must count as female-headed because of the lack of an identifiable adult male in the unit. Otherwise the internal relations within the household between men and women are too rarely explored empirically, although some sweeping assumptions about dependency and decision-making are certainly made. Typically, the assumption is that it is women who are dependent and men who make the decisions.

The second vanishing trick is unpaid work. It is now admitted by economists, at least when under pressure, that women do a great deal of unpaid work in all economies. Many economists are still unwilling, however, to admit how important that work is to the standard of living of everyone in society, and to our understanding of how the economy operates under stress. And that unwillingness, that "vanishing", is in part the result of the relative lack of information, not only on the extent of unpaid work and how it is organized but also on its importance to the reproduction of the whole society.

The third point of disappearance concerns the **value of women's paid work**. Women are subjected to systematic devaluation and discrimination in pay and conditions. Work predominantly done by women, and skills predominantly held by women, are systematically undervalued within firms, by employers, by fellow workers, by state policy, and through market processes. As a result women themselves often undervalue their skills and economic contribution. Much of women's waged work and other paid work is "off the books", so there is little information and less regulation; for the same reason, women have fewer rights to social benefits which depend on registered paid work in certain sectors. All the data available therefore systematically understate the importance of women's paid work to the economy.

### *Why does this matter?*

These three "vanishing tricks" add up to a pattern whereby both the economy and economic policy operate on a basis of ignorance and undervaluation of women's work. This matters for two reasons. First, it is a deep injustice. Second - and a reason perhaps with more leverage over pressured economic policy-makers - it leads to serious mistakes in economic policy.

We began this Introduction with a discussion of the first reason: the injustice involved. Those who analyse the relations between the genders are often accused by political movements of divisiveness. You are, women are told, creating division; or, yes, there are divisions, but do not focus on them, focus instead on what unites working people. But the problem with this argument is that the divisions are real, not created by argument. The divisions place frequently intolerable burdens on women: the United Nations has recognized one important aspect of this burden, in its studies on the extreme length and stress of many women's working day in Africa. They undermine the ability of half the population to participate in economic and political change. Focussing on the nature of the divisions, the ignorance and the bias is not, in these circumstances, to create further divisions but a necessary step towards overcoming them.

As for the second reason for the importance of the "vanishing tricks", the mistakes created in economic policy, we focus much of the rest of the paper on this issue. We have chosen three major areas of policy, corresponding to the "vanishing tricks": unpaid work, paid

work, and the household and the family. For each of these, we examine very briefly the scale and nature of women's economic activity, the social and economic relations which structure women's work and the standard of living, and some of the serious implications of ignoring women's role. We then go on in each section to look briefly at some of the implications of the argument for a less gender-biased economic policy.

## Unpaid Labour

"The majority [of women] still bear the sole burden of domestic labour. Their contribution to the creation of our country's wealth is unrecognised and mostly unpaid":

ANC-NEC Statement on the Emancipation  
of Women in South Africa, 2 May 1990.

The unpaid labour which goes into the maintenance of the economy and society is still largely unrecognized by economists.\* Yet it is of fundamental importance. It accounts for a large proportion of the total work done in most societies.

Time spent in unpaid or "domestic" labour in industrialized countries in Europe has been estimated approximately to equal [Rose, 1985] or considerably exceed [GLC, 1985] the time spent in paid work. In less industrialized societies the ratio of unpaid to paid work is very likely to be even higher because, for instance, the time spent on agricultural production for home consumption is likely to be much higher.

Studies of unpaid labour in less industrialized countries confirm that it is both very time-consuming and extremely hard work. The studies are mainly small-scale case studies. They show women, who do the bulk of the unpaid work, working very long days in all areas of the Third World. For example, a study in rural Java showed women working an average of 5.5 hours of unpaid labour, and 6.7 hours on income-generating activity a day.

One study in Upper Volta showed women working a 15-hour day in an area with very poor access to fuel and water. A north India case study showed an average for women of 4.9 hours on "domestic" work, **not** including child care, and 4.5 hours on agriculture, some of it for household food [all these examples from Rogers, 1980]. In all these studies, women worked in total much longer hours than men, and had fewer, if any, days off.

Moreover, the functions unpaid labour performs are absolutely necessary. Chief among them are, of course, domestic labour and child care. This has been called "the production of human resources" [Elson, 1991]. It is extraordinary that, while we usually know in great detail how, say, machines are made and what labour goes into their production, economic policy usually pays little attention and knows very little about the production and care of human beings.

Another reason why this unpaid part of the economy is important is because of its interdependence with the paid part of the economy. Almost any change in the organization of the paid economy, for instance, will have some implications for the unpaid economy. Most obviously, paid work and unpaid work compete for women's time. Or, again, where social services deteriorate, it will often imply that someone has to spend more time and more labour making up for the deficiencies (whether they be a simple lack of services, or too long a distance to travel, or inconvenient opening hours). And that "someone" will usually be a woman.

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\* Nor is the problem confined to economists. Mrs de Klerk has only recently said "the women of the new South Africa will have to become more labour orientated ... she will have to work as hard as or even harder than her male companion." (*Citizen*, 20 July 1990)

Most statements of economic policy, all over the world, completely fail to take account of this interdependence. They fail to assess the impact of the economic changes they are recommending on the unpaid economy. It is simply assumed that women will cope. Yet there is increasing evidence from many countries that this assumption is incorrect. This is especially true when an economy is under stress, as the South African economy will be over the coming decades. The changes it will be undergoing can easily impose particular pressures on women. And when such pressures become too great, the women suffer, the economy suffers and the wider networks of social relations which hold society together suffer too. Thus, inadequate social services imply greater demands on women's time, and this will have effects on the whole range of activities which they undertake. For example, excessive demands on the domestic sphere can make it impossible for women to take work outside the home, thus reducing the labour available to the paid work sectors of the economy. The effects of too much pressure on women's time can also spread to the wider economy and society. They can undermine the networks of relations among women which are so important to community strength and survival.

Some of the results of such pressures on women have already been seen in South Africa. Communities can fall apart. These are well documented processes, of which there is evidence not only from South Africa itself but also from other countries around the world. Thus, just to give one example, Moser [1989] has documented the horrifying results on the lives of children in Ecuador, ranging through malnutrition, criminalization and lack of education, when the impacts of economic policies on women are not taken seriously by the macro-economic planners.

We need to make sure that such things do not happen in a democratic South Africa as its economy comes under the stress of major change. We also need to ensure that recognition of the centrality of women's unpaid labour does not remain at the level of pious sentiment. To do that, we need to understand the nature of unpaid labour. Unpaid labour, like paid labour, is not an atomized activity, i.e. it is not done by individuals in isolation from each other. Like paid labour, it is organized according to social relations of production which can be identified and understood and which change only slowly under pressure. The most important of these work relations are those which allocate some types of unpaid work predominantly to some women. That work we often call "domestic" - cooking, cleaning, child care - is very predominantly women's work, and the sexual division of labour in this work is very rigid. Women undertaking this work alone for a household can often become exhausted: one author of this paper met a woman plantation worker working regularly from 4.00 a.m. to 11.00 or 12.00 p.m., because "I have only sons, so I have no-one to help me" [Mackintosh, 1989].

Among women, unpaid labour is also shared out according to social relations, such as those of marriage and kinship. Mothers-in-law in some African rural areas may be able to concentrate more on income earning work when a younger wife joins the household. Co-wives, neighbours, more distant kin: women establish among themselves (unequal) patterns of sharing out of domestic work, trying to cope with heavy and demanding work under economic and social constraints.

Unpaid agricultural labour, similarly, everywhere obeys some conventional sexual division of labour: different from place to place, but always there. Women may retain commitments to or continue to be subjected to demands for unpaid agricultural work, while also needing to sustain a capacity for earning income. In such a situation, the access of male members of the household to the unpaid labour of women can become problematic and subject to challenge. Such a conflict over the social relations of unpaid work is then easily blamed on women, although the conflict is generated by economic stress, making existing relations untenable for women [Whitehead, 1990].

In industrialized, as in poorer countries, people shift between unpaid and paid work according to the state of the economy [Rose, 1985]. In economic recession, people everywhere fall back on doing more work for themselves when cash is tight. And everywhere this tends to mean more work for women. In industrialized countries this is unjust, but severe only for the poor. In poor countries, the extra work may stretch women to breaking point, while not eroding the sexual division of labour which prevents boys and men from assisting. When economic stress increases the relative importance of unpaid work for survival, women bear the brunt.

To deal effectively with these issues in an economic policy for a democratic South Africa, we suggest four practical steps which can be taken. First, we must do our own calculations of the contribution of the unpaid labour of both men and women within the economy. We need to know approximately how large the contribution is and what roles it performs within the economy. Without this, we will not have a full picture of the real economy; we will not be able to assess the full range of impacts of any economic policy proposal; most especially, we will not be able to assess their impacts on women. Drawing up these estimates will not be easy; but it can be done - it has been done elsewhere. At first, they will necessarily be based on limited knowledge. The initial estimates will have to be based on the few local, often quite small-scale, studies which exist, and they will necessarily be very rough; they can be refined and made more precise over time. It will be a second set of statistics/data which can be read alongside those on financial flows and the paid economy. Taking such a step would, for the first time in South Africa, begin to remove the male bias from economic statistics.

It is important to be clear that what we are arguing for here is a second set of accounts (dual accounts) to be used alongside the current ones. We are **not** arguing for one set of accounts which tries to integrate the paid and unpaid economies into one. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, there are the difficulties of measurement: how would we "value" different kinds of unpaid labour in relation to labour which is given a monetary reward? On the other hand, the fact that this part of the economy is unpaid does make a difference to how it works. The paid side of the economy responds, in part, to financial stimuli; it operates - however imperfectly - through markets. This is not true of the unpaid economy. We need to understand how that functions in its own terms. This means taking seriously the points which are made in this section about how the unpaid economy works and how it interlinks with the paid economy.

Second, moreover, these statistics must be **used**. A minimum requirement for this is that each broad strategy for the international economy should produce an assessment, in as detailed terms as possible, of the impacts which it would have both on the unpaid economy and on its relation to the paid economy.

Third, however, we can design policies which are specifically aimed at improving conditions and productivity in the unpaid economy. Indeed, all macro-economic policies should attempt to include such policies as an integral part of their overall strategies. Only by such positive policies can the position of women be really improved. Just take one example. A huge amount of time is spent by women in rural areas simply in getting water and collecting fuel. This is work, but it is unpaid. It is also very necessary work. A policy which aimed directly at improving the local supply of water and fuel can result in major savings of labour and considerably improve the lives and health of women. It can also potentially have effects on the wider economy. Such a measure could make it possible for women to engage more fully in other productive labour, including paid labour. This in itself would put cash, and thus a degree of independence, directly into women's hands. It would also represent an important improvement in life in rural areas and contribute to a much wider range of policies which are needed if there is not to be in the future a massive drift of people from the countryside to urban areas. Finally, such a policy would also of course represent a much more efficient use of society's total labour resources.

Moreover, the existence of "dual accounts", for the paid economy and for the unpaid economy, will aid in the assessment of political priorities. At the moment, when consideration is barely given to the unpaid economy, it is extremely difficult to assess the implications of a policy towards that economy (such as reducing the time spent in water collection); and it is especially difficult to prioritize such policies in relation to policies for the paid economy. The combination of initiatives we are proposing here should make this really feasible for the first time.

Fourth, however, all the policy suggestions so far have been concerned with improving the lives of women (and thereby the functioning of economy and society) in the parts of the economy where they are currently working. And here we meet the eternal dilemma. While policies such as these will force us to recognize the significance of unpaid labour, and improve the conditions for performing it, we also need to address deeper questions. For we have argued that the unpaid and the paid economies interact. Women's work in the unpaid economy conditions their entry into paid work, influencing how they may earn cash. So, while policies are needed which seek to improve the conditions of unpaid work, other policies should try to ensure that women's options in the paid economy are widened, not narrowed, by changing economic circumstance.

In other words, some policies are needed to try to change the way domestic and paid work interact. For example, some currently unpaid work could become paid, as it might if basic social services were extended. More radically, it must be recognized, through education and campaigns, that wages for paid labour are due in part to the unpaid work which made that paid labour possible. Those who receive wages must be made to recognize and to learn to share those wages with the people who support them. And we must also challenge the idea that it is women who should do most of the unpaid labour in the economy. Sharing domestic labour, between men and women, must become the norm and not the exception.

We now turn, then, to the other side of the coin: women's work in the paid economy and to the third of the "vanishing tricks", the value of women's paid labour.

### **Paid Labour**

As we have seen, much of the work done by women is unpaid. But even within the paid economy their contribution can suffer from a variety of disappearing acts and devaluations. Perhaps most obviously women find they are confined to particular types of work and that these jobs are also the lowest paid in the economy. So when we look at the occupational structure within the South African economy as revealed in the national census, in addition to the more familiar racial stratification we find women concentrated in particular sectors and absent from others.

But before we consider the tables further, a word about South African statistics, for the way in which women vanish from the economy and economic debate also affects them. In South Africa, African men and women in their millions vanish for a variety of reasons, but overall more African women than men disappear. As there is not compulsory registration of births and deaths for Africans, there has not been a really accurate measure of the size of the South African population, and in particular its African component. Under-enumeration is aggravated by the harsh penalties for infringement of the many laws which determine where Africans may legally live, making respondents cautious of possible exposure as "illegal" residents. In 1985, while the estimated under-enumeration for whites was 5.6 per cent, for Africans it was a massive 16.8 per cent. Moreover, the almost total ban on the entry of women from the rural areas into the urban areas resulted in there being more women "illegals" than men, and thus a lower proportion of women being counted.

Additionally, millions of South Africans disappeared from the statistics when the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC) were deemed to be "independent", and their population was excluded from official statistics. There has been no census in these areas since. Apartheid has had profound effects on the demographic distribution of Africans, and in particular on the female/male ratio in different parts of the country. If we look at the regional distribution of African population, we find roughly 3 per cent more men in the urban areas than women, about 1 per cent differential in the rural areas outside of the Bantustans, but nearly 5 per cent more women than men in the Bantustans. These are average official figures and there is a tremendous variation. But it does mean that the exclusion of some Bantustans has not only reduced the overall population but also distorted the figures, as significantly more women than men have been excluded.

The occupation and employment tables show a further gender distortion. The census figures only classify those who are on employment registers. Those not registered - part-time and casual workers - are not counted. Here again, these are categories in which there is a high proportion of women. The scale of the distortion can be appreciated when we realise that there are 800,000 registered domestic workers, and an estimated 2 million unregistered ones [UNESCO, 1988]. Many of the jobs of this type (part-time, unregistered, casual) fall into what is often called the informal sector. It is a sector which is important for the overall functioning of the economy and society, and particularly important for women. But it is not included, for the most part, in these tables.

Table 1, on occupational distribution, has therefore to be considered in this context. We find that only 36.4 per cent of those classified as "economically active" are women, compared to 63 per cent men. As has been previously indicated, the categorization of 73.3 per cent of South African women as not "economically active" is simply inaccurate. It would be more accurate to say that, of the paid work-force in registered full-time employment, 36.4 per cent are women. The distribution of women within the paid work-force reveals a distinct gender bias. In only two categories are there more women than men: Service, and Clerical and Sales. Women are employed within a very narrow range of occupations and over 72 per cent are employed in only four occupational categories: service, clerical and sales, agriculture and professional. If those "not classifiable" are included, then 86.5 per cent of women workers are employed in only five of the ten categories in the census, with 13.4 per cent in the remaining five categories. In contrast, 52 per cent of the male work-force is to be found in these five categories.

Though only one-third of the paid labour force, women form two-thirds of service workers, over half those in clerical and sales, and nearly a half of the professionals. (It should be noted that the professional category includes nursing and teaching - hence the large number of women. In the managerial and executive category, only 17 per cent of the work-force are women.) Even within these categories, some jobs are highly feminized: 96.4 per cent of those doing typing and related work are women; 95.2 per cent of registered nurses are women; in domestic work, between 94 and 96 per cent are women. Less obviously, 83 per cent of archivists are women, 75 per cent of the operator/productive workers in the clothing industry are women, and nearly 75 per cent of the bookkeepers. [Maconachie, 1989]

Such patterns of employment are not unique to South Africa, but can be found in most countries. The pattern is set because assumptions are made about which jobs are more suitable for women and which for men. These assessments are based in part on gender roles assigned to women and men in the domestic sphere. In addition, psychological and physical traits are attributed to all men and all women, and are used to rationalize the roles and employment for which they are deemed suitable. Men are tall and strong, women are small and frail. In western society, men are supposedly stronger and suited to physical/manual work; they are better at science and able to understand machines, and because they are allegedly immune from emotional judgements and operate on pure

reason, they make good managers and executives. In contrast, women are physically weak, supposedly better at arts, with a particular talent for the "caring" professions, given to emotional outbursts and intuitive judgements, and therefore incapable of undertaking major responsibility in business/industry.

Yet these notions of what are female and male characteristics are not only inaccurate but totally artificial - they are cultural constructs and vary between places and with time, e.g., though today in South Africa women are considered most suitable for domestic work, well into the beginning of the 20th century in Natal and the Transvaal men and not women were the domestic workers, and still are in many parts of Asia. In times of war women replace men in most categories of civilian employment: they do heavy work on the land and in industry, drive and repair trucks and cranes, operate heavy machinery, etc. In South Africa, African women have traditionally been the cultivators of the land. This did not fit in with the Victorian notions of the missionaries, and when schools were established African women were trained to be the domestic workers, and were excluded from the agricultural training that was provided for African men.

Divisions between jobs done by men and jobs done by women become self-perpetuating because, in turn, they shape the jobs, the tools and the work environment. Decisions about the size and weight of loads, the force required to move levers, the design of tools, even the length of spade and pick handles were based on assumptions about which sex is doing the work. In office furniture, desks for managers are sized according to male physique, secretarial ones for women's!

Hours of employment, the responsibility and concentration expected of senior employees and the facilities provided at the work place are based on the assumption that someone, meaning a woman, is doing unpaid labour at home which enables the worker to conform to what is required of "him". If career opportunities, promotion, and work patterns are based on the assumption that there is no need for a worker to have time off to bear children, no facilities are provided to care for them, and no provision is available for domestic work, then women are effectively excluded, or at best handicapped, and categories are further entrenched. It is only when the work environment and employment conditions become people shaped instead of man shaped that women can have equal opportunity.

The notion that boys will become the wage earners, and girls dependent wives, ensures that boys rather than girls get preference for education and access to skills, while girls are the ones who help with domestic chores and may be required to leave school to help with care of siblings or aged parents. When women do have access to education and training, it is frequently limited by career advice and facilities based on false notions of which types of jobs women are supposed to do. The lack of training in its turn prevents women from moving into other types of jobs.

Furthermore, given this kind of categorization, a lower value is attributed to work done by women. To overcome a shortage of skilled white labour in 1971, a committee of the South African Economic Advisory Council recommended "the greater utilisation of white female labour in productive occupations in order to release male labour for **more productive work**" (our emphasis)! Not only are different characteristics and jobs assigned to men and women, in other words, but different values as well. Before workers organized and bargained for wages, employers set wages and rationalized the low scales on the basis that the family was being provided for by father/male and women were only working for pin money.\* So the type of jobs done by women became the low-paid, low-

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\* In South Africa this notion was extended and the rationale was used to provide a basis for low male African wages, especially in the mining industry - where it was argued that the family was being provided for through subsistence farming. The labour of African women has effectively subsidized the mining industry for generations.

**TABLE 1: 1985: OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES BY GENDER AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE WORKFORCE ACCORDING TO POPULATION GROUP**

Occupation	Percent	total	percent who were			
			African	Coloured	Asian	White
<b>1. Professional, Semi-professional &amp; Technical</b>						
Women	46.7	333 132	36.4	11.0	3.2	49.4
Men	53.3	380 704	18.7	6.6	5.2	69.1
<b>2. Managerial, Executive &amp; Administrative</b>						
Women	17.4	44 644	4.0	5.4	2.9	87.7
Men	82.6	211 311	4.3	3.0	5.3	87.5
<b>3. Clerical &amp; Sales</b>						
Women	56.6	662 622	19.1	11.9	4.6	64.4
Men	43.4	507 205	38.0	11.3	12.9	37.9
<b>4. Transport &amp; Communications</b>						
Women	6.2	26 020	43.1	9.4	1.8	45.6
Men	93.8	395 499	72.2	11.2	3.4	13.2
<b>5. Service</b>						
Women	66.2	966 238	82.1	13.7	0.4	3.8
Men	33.8	493 951	65.0	9.2	2.5	23.3
<b>6. Farmer, Fisherman, Hunter &amp; Farmworker</b>						
Women	27.0	326 142	84.9	14.1	0.1	1.0
Men	73.0	880 023	75.8	15.6	0.4	8.1
<b>7. Tradesman &amp; Apprentice</b>						
Women	5.8	22 306	25.1	18.4	3.9	52.6
Men	94.2	365 309	15.9	16.9	5.1	62.0
<b>8. Mining &amp; Quarrying, Foreman, Supervisor, Operator, Production &amp; Related</b>						
Women	15.3	272 434	53.5	34.8	8.3	3.4
Men	84.7	1 502 726	77.9	10.8	2.9	8.4
<b>9. Unskilled</b>						
Women	13.4	60 183	64.8	31.1	3.2	0.9
Men	86.6	389 862	78.4	19.1	1.4	1.2
<b>10. Not Classifiable</b>						
Women	52.3	445 910	84.7	10.2	2.5	2.6
Men	47.7	406 097	80.1	11.2	3.9	4.7
<b>Total Economically Active</b>						
Women	36.4	3 159 676	60.1	14.6	2.7	22.6
Men	63.6	5 532 687	61.6	11.9	3.8	22.7
<b>Not Economically Active</b>						
Women	59.1	8 680 687	66.3	11.4	3.8	18.4
Men	40.9	6 012 595	68.7	11.9	3.3	16.5
<b>Population</b>						
Women	50.6	11 840 363	64.6	12.3	3.5	19.6
Men	49.4	11 545 282	65.0	11.9	3.5	19.5

Source: Maconachie (1989). Note that the exclusion of TBVC leads to a distortion in total population and particular in proportion of women.

status jobs in society. They were not valued in terms of skill and responsibility. Many were also in the areas which were the most difficult to unionise, and in South Africa labour legislation still does not apply to domestic work and agriculture, categories in which women predominate.

It is important to note that it is not that women are necessarily paid less than men doing the same job. It is the jobs that acquire a low status and low income because they are perceived as "women's work". Because of their low status, lower pay scales and association with feminine characteristics, men who have a wider choice avoid such jobs, and the category is perpetuated.

An illustration is found when we compare wages in South Africa in the sectors of industry where employment of African women is high with those in which there is a predominance of African male labour. Average wages are significantly lower in the former (Table 2). The clothing, food and textile industries have developed with high rates of employment of women with a percentage female/male ratio of 60/40, and chemicals, furniture, plastics and paper have predominantly male workers with a percentage ratio of 10/90. The wage differentials between blacks and whites are also greater in the women's sector.

Women also find that even though the law provides that there should be no discrimination in wages between men and women, as it does in South Africa, the fringe benefits provided to workers by companies and the state differentiate between women and men, to the detriment of women. Men receive better pensions, and medical aid for women does not automatically extend to spouse and children, though that of the man does. Similarly, women may not be entitled to housing benefits or loans on preferential terms.

In addition, women are subjected to sexual harassment at the work place. As they are at the lowest level in the hierarchy, they are particularly vulnerable to pressure from senior male colleagues who demand sexual favours as a precondition for continued employment or promotion.

**TABLE 2. Comparison of Average monthly wage rates for African Workers**

	1977 Wage (Rands)	% of Average white wage	1984 Wage (Rands)	% of Average white wage
<b>Women's Sector % F/M = 60/40</b>				
Clothing	81	14.3	205	13.8
Food	119	21.6	337	22.3
Textiles	107	17.4	331	20.4
<b>Men's Sector % F/M = 10/90</b>				
Chemicals	176	26.4	561	30.9
Furniture	130	23.6	353	24.5
Plastics	162	25.0	442	24.4
Paper	185	27.7	502	30.0

Source: SAIRR, *Survey of Race Relations 1978-1985*, and *Effects of Apartheid on the Status of Women in South Africa* (Copenhagen 1980) [cited in UNESCO, 1988].

The South African economy, then, is structured so as to subject women workers, and particularly African women, to a greater level of exploitation than male workers, and to deny them the same opportunities and rewards. There are two reasons for trying to rectify this situation. First, as we have said before and will have to say again, it is unjust. To allow the situation to remain in a "democratic" South Africa would nullify most of the

principles on which the liberation struggle in the country has been based. Secondly, to meet even the basic needs of the South African population, all the human resources are going to have to be mobilized to their full potential. This cannot be done by denying opportunities to more than half the population, and the national effort would be further diminished if women are left angry or demoralized by the fact that after such a long struggle they are still oppressed and exploited.

### *New Policies*

New policies must be directed both at improving the conditions, pay scales and opportunities of women workers where they are the moment and at attacking the structural impediments to women's employment and promotion within the labour force. There is a range of possible policies, each attacking these issues from a different angle.

As the South African experience illustrates most admirably, **equal pay for equal work** does not automatically lead to the employment of those who were previously discriminated against. "Equal pay for equal work" was the battle cry of white trade unionists in South Africa in their determination to **exclude** blacks from jobs. Unless accompanied by legislation prohibiting discrimination against women, such a policy can result in the employment of fewer women, in jobs where they compete with men.

We need to be aware also that employers are often anxious to employ women, precisely because women are seen as unorganized, cheap labour. The principle of equal pay for equal work, therefore, remains necessary to prevent the substitution of cheap female labour for unionized male labour. But we must recognize that it can hinder the employment of women and by itself can do nothing to expand the employment of women throughout the economy.

Moreover, as we have seen, men and women rarely do the same work, and occupational patterns in most countries reveal areas which are effectively segregated for women and men. Jobs primarily done by women draw lower rates of pay because they are perceived as "women's jobs". We must therefore reject historic pay scales because they entrench inequitable job pay rates relative to others. Job evaluation schemes which properly consider the skills and experience which women bring to work will have to be set up to operate on the principle of equal pay for equal value. Jobs, particularly those which are done primarily by women, will need to be systematically re-evaluated and paid according to their real value.

The principle of equal value has been accepted in a number of countries. Value is established by initially identifying job components for which a scale is set. Each job is assessed for all the components, and the total points gained establishes the "value" of the job relative to other jobs. The manner in which equal value schemes operate varies. Canada probably has the most advanced method, placing the responsibility upon employers and the state. New legislation will gradually require all work places over a certain size officially to post and implement a job evaluation scheme.

In British legislation, which owes its origin to pressure from the European Economic Community, women can take individual complaints through a system of industrial courts. In the first case in Britain a cook in a shipyard successfully claimed equal pay with a carpenter. Most women taking such actions have been supported by either or both their trade union and the Equal Opportunities Commission, who pay the legal costs. Many women trade unionists seek a dual strategy of simultaneously lodging a claim in the courts and negotiating a pay claim under the existing collective bargaining procedure. The legal process puts pressure on the employers to concede at the negotiating table, while the trade union presence means that the case can be generalized from the individual complainant to a group of women.

In the US there are few trade unions to put the pressure on in this way. However, their legal system allows groups of workers to sue their employer collectively in class actions. Thousands of women workers have won equal value cases and wage rises of 20 per cent are not untypical. A strong National Committee on Pay Equity functions with hundreds of women's and labour organizations as affiliates. There is also a strong academic research wing to this campaign which has gathered a lot of relevant evidence.

It is difficult for isolated women workers to undertake cases such as these, even with union assistance, and the personal costs are often great. In accordance with the principles in the ANC's constitutional guidelines (as amended on the question of gender), a job evaluation policy in South Africa would require the initiative and responsibility for securing such re-evaluation to be placed on the state rather than leave it as a right for women to claim through the courts. Ideally, mechanisms should be designed which combine the strength of the state with the initiative of women.

Beyond the issue of pay, and attempting to address entry into particular occupations, there is the possibility of equal opportunities policies. In many countries legislation has been introduced making it illegal to discriminate against women and providing for equal opportunities to be extended to them. However, this will benefit very few women if it operates on the assumption that women already have the necessary education, training and skills, and that all that is necessary is to introduce an element of free and fair competition. In addition, equal opportunities legislation will have very little impact if it does no more than facilitate the entry of more women into the existing employment structure, which, as already indicated, was designed with men in mind. By definition, women cannot enter and compete on a basis of equality.

The creation of real equal opportunities for women requires much more and fundamental rethinking, such as: tools and machinery have to be redesigned to take into account people workers rather than just male workers; jobs and the work environment have to be reorganized, hours altered; the fact that women need time off to bear children has to be reorganized and incorporated; that both parents have responsibility for child care has to be acknowledged, etc. Changes such as these would begin to create the level playing field on which women could take up opportunities on a basis of real equality.

**Affirmative action** is a form of positive discrimination in favour of those previously disadvantaged, and can be used as a transitional, and therefore temporary, measure to redress the balance. The ANC has committed itself to a policy of affirmative action for women. In the sphere of employment it must go beyond simply giving preference to women among equally qualified candidates. It must extend to advancement and promotion and recruitment, including an obligation to **search** for suitable women candidates. Many gifted and skilled women have been excluded through being rendered invisible by existing hiring practices. In addition, there needs to be affirmative action in the provision of education training and support, and the conscious elimination of stereotyping in the education and careers advisory systems.

Finally, there are a number of steps that can be taken to improve the **conditions of women workers** where they are presently located in the economy. South African trade unions have taken up issues such as child care provisions and maternity leave. The fight for shorter working hours benefits all workers, and has a particular significance for women, who often bear the sole burden of domestic work. It is organized black workers who have demanded, and in a number of cases won, agreement on maternity leave, a facility not previously available even to white women.

But these are not "benefits" that should be available to women only if agreed by the employer. If we take gender seriously, then in our new policies they must be recognized as rights to which women are entitled. We need to go even further and recognize that the

other side of the coin we have been describing is that jobs are defined and employment is structured on the basis that men/workers are labour units, not people with families, parents who have babies and children who need care and attention.

Already some unions in South Africa have successfully taken up some of these issues, as concerning not just women but both men and women. In a number of cases, unions have asked for and obtained paternity leave. More recently, CCAWUSA's agreement with Pick & Pay provides that, where both parents are employed by the company, they can share "maternity" leave benefits, which we should rename as "parental leave". The agreement also provides that either parent can take sick leave for the illness of a child, the child's medical certificate being submitted on the same basis as that of a sick worker.

So we see that policies directed at improving women's present conditions can be extended to help bring about the more fundamental changes within the paid labour system, and can begin to create more pressure for change in the domestic division of labour on which so much of male domination depends.

### **The "Household" and the "Family"**

The end of the last section brought us back once again to the question of links between paid work and the domestic division of labour. We therefore turn here to focus in the final part of the paper on the institution which shapes and contains those links: the household and its associated wider networks of kinship and domestic life.

This brings us back to the first in our list of "vanishing tricks". Policy relating to households and families is often seen as a "social" issue, divorced from economics. Economic policy appears to be independent of the internal workings of households. We argue in this section that this is an illusion. Economic policy is, in fact, always built upon assumptions about the family. Where these assumptions are wrong, or where they conflict with women's economic needs, policy can worsen women's situation almost as a by-product, unthinkingly.

It is always difficult to think clearly about the family and the household in the context of economic policy. It is an issue which is so close to us all that it is hard to stand back from it. But we hope to show that it is important to make visible, and to revise, the unstated assumptions. In the context of South Africa, where so many people experience the intense pain of divided families, where so many women support dependants alone, and where there is so much official discussion of family "breakdown", it is particularly important to get right this linkage between social assumptions and economic policies.

This section begins by examining the assumptions typically made about the organization of the household. It then explores some aspects of social services and land and agricultural policies, using these aspects of economic policy to illustrate the importance of rethinking our assumptions about the household. (We stress that the discussion which follows is illustrative, because there are, of course, many aspects of policies on agriculture and social services, also relevant to women, not touched on here.)

### ***The Problem of "The Household"***

All over the world, there is a tendency to construct economic policy on the basis of a rather simple "model" of the household unit. This model assumes that the household is:

- headed by an identifiable male, who makes the decisions for the whole household;

- a unit with common economic interests;
- communitarian in its use of resources for the greatest benefit of all members;
- consisting of a couple including the male head, with identifiable dependants including his female partner.

Households which do not fit into this model, such as those supported chiefly by a woman, are then deviant, a "problem".

There are three main problems with this model household as the basis for policy-making, in general and in a free South Africa.

The first is that this model does not describe the majority of households, anywhere. The "nuclear" household with a man in paid work, a wife undertaking only unpaid work, and one or two dependent children, forms now only a tiny minority of British households. In South Africa, where apartheid has pulled African families apart, a UNESCO report [1988] estimated that the following percentages of African households were "female headed", that is, contained no economically active male:

- 59 per cent in Bantustan rural areas;
- 47 per cent in Bantustan urban areas;
- 25 per cent on white-owned farms;
- 20 per cent in small towns outside Bantustans
- 30 per cent in metropolitan areas.

However inaccurate the detail of these figures may be, the overall impression, that a large proportion of people who are genuinely dependants (children, the infirm, the elderly) are supported by women, is undoubtedly correct. As a result, any economic policies in South Africa which are based on the idea of a male "breadwinner" in every household, or even in a majority of households, will be based on a false premise, and will cause further pain and suffering.

The second problem with the "model" of the household just described is that it is internally self-contradictory: it can never really exist in the form described. A household which is organized in a strict hierarchy of decision-making and control by a male head is most unlikely to share resources equally among family members, and those household members are therefore unlikely to have wholly common interests. There is now research from many countries to confirm that, within households, women and men do not share resources equally, nor apply their resources to the same ends [Whitehead, 1980]. Men tend to keep a disproportionate share of their earnings for spending upon their individual wants; women apply virtually all their resources to the needs of their families, very often putting their children's needs before their own. Recent interviewing of women in South Africa confirms that these problems are not absent in the townships and rural areas: see, for example, the interviews in Lawson [1986].

Policy must be based, not on an ideal image of a communitarian household, but on information about the real economic relations within households and their implications for work, living standards and the use of resources. We should note that we are not suggesting here that household members do not share and support each other - that has often been the essential basis of people's survival - but that the limitations of that sharing and the implications of unequal power between men and women must be properly recognized.

“work:” and “the working day” to include unpaid work, hence recognizing and valuing women’s total working day;

“production” to include the production of the human resources and reproduction of the social relations in society;

the “household” as a complex of economic relations which can be influenced by economic policy;

“women” as full working adults, not dependants;

“income distribution” as measured among adults, not households; and

“skill” as not an objective fact but a category structured by gender-related assumptions.

If we can change these ways of thinking about the economy, if we can rethink some of our basic categories, and design policies based on this new thinking, then the coming period of economic restructuring could be a good one for women too.

### ***Guidelines***

We end, not with a summary of all the detailed policy recommendations which we have made in this paper, but with four broader guidelines for future work on economic policy:

1. All economic policies should be examined for gender bias, and policies which worsen the relative position of women should be rejected.
2. Any economic policy package should include positive policies to improve the position of the poorest women.
3. Campaigning to change popular conceptions of gender relations is an essential part of economic policy.
4. Women’s active organization to control the use of economic resources is essential to taking gender seriously in economic policy for a democratic South Africa.

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