

RESEARCH BRIEF: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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Women's economic employment status

Global employment trends reveal women's unequal share of employment varying across sectors; it being smallest in the construction sector and greatest in public administration, community, social and other services (ILO 2012). Between these extremes are sectors where productivity is high or growing, yet women's participation is low: energy (mining & quarrying, electricity, gas & water supply); commercial agriculture; and trade, transportation, accommodation & food, & business admin services. A subsequent ILO report (2015) suggests that female labour participation programmes are important for economic growth, resilience to economic shocks and poverty reduction (ILO 2015, p.59). Constraints in time use, inaccessibility to assets and credit, discrimination by markets and work institutions appear to be key barriers to women's opportunities in improving their opportunities in labour market (World Bank 2012).

The ILO report (2015) suggests that programmes and policies designed to encourage females to participate in labour market may aim to:

- Balance work and family responsibilities, such as availability of more flexible working-time arrangements, maternity and parental leave and the provision of affordable childcare facilities.
- Improve women's pay through measures such as minimum wage increases to tackle the over-representation of women in low-wage jobs.
- Consider Anti-discrimination policies that are actively enforced.
- Improve tax policy to eliminate tax penalties for the second earner in a household as well as supportive educational policies to improve career options and progression for women.

Call for research

The EPPI-Centre is now commissioning two systematic reviews for the UK Department of International Development. The aim of the first is to understand what influences women's employment in sectors with high or growing productivity that are male dominated. The aim of the second is to identify the effectiveness and design features of interventions that aim to overcome the barriers to women's participation in those labour markets.

These systematic reviews may be conducted either by a large team with the skills to synthesise the relevant literatures, or by two teams conducting one review each liaising well to maximise the synergy through sharing and discussing key concepts, definitions and identified studies throughout the work.

As mentioned above, applications are invited for two packages of work:

- Systematic review 1: Understanding what influences women's employment

Question 1: ***What are the main barriers to, and facilitators of, women's participation in labour market sectors where participation is low?***

- Systematic review 2: Intervening to enhance women's employment

Question 2: ***What are the effectiveness and design features of interventions that aim to overcome the barriers to women's participation in the labour market in higher growth/male-dominated sectors?***

Organisations may submit proposals for one OR both packages. Proposals must make clear how they will work to ensure that the two reviews relate well to each other, whether they

are conducted by the same or different teams, and whether they are conducted by the same or different organisations.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW 1: Understanding what influences women's employment

The focus of interest is whether or how women are benefitting from economic transformations in low and middle income countries. Are they employed at all, participating in more productive activities, or progressing to more senior levels?

Question: ***What are the main barriers to, and facilitators of, women's participation in labour market sectors where participation is low?***

The scope of a review addressing this question is:

Population: All women aged 16+, not just young women, in low and middle income countries. There is interest in stratifying the evidence in transitions, in terms of life stages: 'adult' working life 15 – 64; youth 10 – 30; transitions from school to work, returning to work after childbirth, migrating from rural to urban areas (but not migration across national borders). For the latter, interest is on the urban destination not the rural area they leave behind.

Policy sectors: Interest is mainly in sectors where women's employment is low, and the potential for productivity is high:

- Commercial agriculture: where productivity is higher than smallholdings or subsistence farming, and agriculture is linked to larger business supply chains and larger markets
- Energy: Mining and Quarrying, Electricity, Gas and water supply
- Higher productivity sectors: Trade, transportation, accommodation and food, and Business admin services

Micro and small businesses are to be considered, but self-employment, with no employees, is not.

Outcomes: Are women able to access economic opportunities? Although all women, whatever their earnings, should be included, there is less interest in the extremes, either the extreme poor (where synthesised evidence has focused on microfinance) or extreme rich. Outcomes may include:

- Formal or informal waged employment
- Earnings growth (as a proxy measure for moving from less productive to better employment)
- Under employment
- Security of contracts
- Entry into employment within a sector
- Progression in employment within a sector

Minimum wage is not of interest because this does not apply across sectors.

More detail about outcomes may be available in the road map for women's economic empowerment which is currently being updated. The companion **Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment** (2015) offers outcomes and indicators (see Box 1).

Box 1: Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment

DIRECT OUTCOME INDICATORS

- Specific information and knowledge acquired in training (measure has to be program specific)
- Skills developed through training programs (measure has to be program specific)
- Pre and post training scores and training attendance records
- Technology adoption and effective use (measured through frequency of use of high impact information and other productive technologies)

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME INDICATORS

- Changes in business or farming management practices
- Perceived value of business and agricultural training and technology
- Intensity of mobile phone use for productive purposes
- Participation and involvement in formal and informal business-related associations (including indicators of participation, such as attendance rates)
- Changes in traditional gender roles in the household and changes in indicators of self-esteem (from independent reporting or self-reporting on questions regarding traditional household chores)

FINAL OUTCOME INDICATORS

Urban women (entrepreneurs and business leaders)

- Changing employment from traditional to untraditional sectors for women's employment
- Profits (variable and difficult to measure) in sectors not traditionally employing women, or after moving sectors
- Revenues (easier to obtain than profits, but still difficult to measure, especially for micro-firms) in sectors not traditionally employing women, or after moving sectors
- Employment, including self-employment, regularity of employment, hours worked and income earned, as well as employment generated by the firm (potentially easier to measure in larger firms) in sectors not traditionally employing women, or after moving sectors

Rural women (entrepreneurs and farmers)

- Changing employment from traditional to untraditional sectors for women's employment
- Individual and household assets, including women's individual ownership and control of assets in sectors not traditionally employing women, or after moving sectors
- Investment in productive assets such as land and livestock, including ownership and control questions in sectors not traditionally employing women, or after moving sectors
- Employment, including self-employment, regularity of employment, hours worked and income earned in sectors not traditionally employing women, or after moving sectors

All women

- Household income/expenditure and control over it
- Individual savings (independent from household and joint male and female savings)
- Women's well-being, including indicators of self-esteem, satisfaction with work and life, and stress levels (many of these indicators are based on self-reporting so care needs to be taken to choose well-constructed measures)
- Women's empowerment indicators of increased choice and decision making in family and public life (through independent reporting or self-reporting of behaviour)

Types of included studies:

- qualitative studies to understand women's (non) participation in employment in higher growth/ male dominated sectors;
- quantitative longitudinal studies to assess the pathways of women's entry into employment, re-entry, changes in employment and progression.

Types of synthesis:

The options for synthesis include:

- configuring the findings of studies within and across policy sectors – framework or thematic synthesis;
- aggregating the findings of quantitative studies within policy sectors – statistical meta-analysis;
- mixed methods, where qualitative and quantitative studies are aggregated across a broad conceptual framework to address both the nature and scale of women's non-participation;
- the findings of qualitative studies are compared with the findings of quantitative studies identified when addressing question 2.

Contextual analysis: Qualitative studies commonly address contextual issues. However, it may be useful to have in mind an initial framework as illustrated in Figure 1.

Scale of review: This calls for an in-depth review of largely qualitative literature which will require detailed analysis.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW 2: Intervening to enhance women's employment

Interest in enhancing women's economic empowerment through employment may be served by addressing this question:

Question: **What are the effectiveness and design features of interventions that aim to overcome the barriers to women's participation in the labour market in higher growth/male-dominated sectors?**

Population: As for option 1.

Policy sectors: As for option 1 above.

Outcomes: As for option 1 above.

Interventions: interventions to enhance women's economic empowerment can be found in the [Roadmap for Women's Economic Empowerment](#). Those interventions most closely related to waged employment are of most interest.

Types of included studies:

- Experimental and quasi-experimental studies comparing groups offered different interventions: experimental studies where interventions were allocated to group by investigators (or not), randomly (or not);
- Longitudinal studies observing a single group before and after an intervention (interrupted time series);
- Observational studies using matched or statistical controls (eg propensity score matching, regression discontinuity design, multivariate or instrumental variables regression);

- Systematic reviews: where evidence has already been synthesised systematic reviews may be incorporated in this work without duplicating existing analyses.

Types of synthesis:

This question can be answered in stages by splitting it into two:

What are the effects of interventions that aim to overcome the barriers to women's participation in the labour market? What are the design features of effective and ineffective interventions?

The first question can be answered by aggregating the findings of quantitative studies, either in tables or a statistical meta-analysis. The second question can be answered by extending the analysis of effects to investigate the heterogeneity of studies addressing different interventions. This may be done narratively or quantitatively, using a range of methods, depending on the data available.

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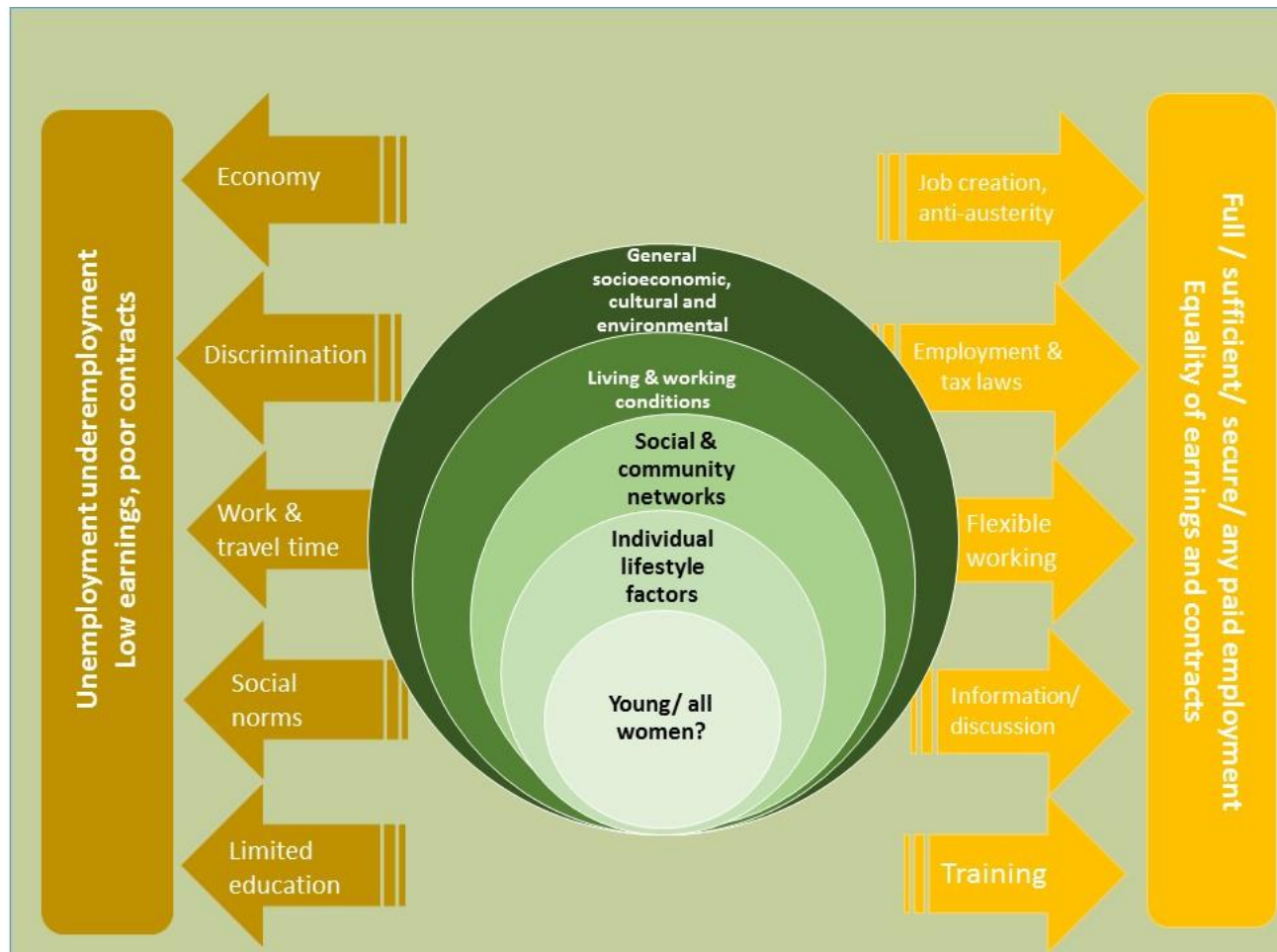


Figure 1: Initial conceptual framework for analysing women's employment (building on Dahlgren and Whitehead 1991; Wang et al 2005; Ang and Oliver 2015)