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ABSTRACT

Most female workers in developing countries do not have wage jobs. However, the preponderance of female workers in non-wage jobs is not consistent across all developing countries. It is highly likely that the proportion of non-wage female workers in developing countries is greater than is suggested by the statistics. Consequently, mothers in the developing world cannot be assumed to be freely available to serve as full-time child caretakers, and the demand for early childhood care and education and family benefits and services (ECCE-FBS) among working mothers in developing countries is huge. These facts have the following implications for ECCE-FBS policy in developing countries: (1) family support measures such as parental leave are unlikely to be available in developing countries in the near future; (2) given a relatively high per-child cost, institutional services for children under the age of 3 are also out of reach in most developing countries; (3) mothers in disadvantaged countries are not easily available to attend classes; and (4) investment in the education of girls and women will have a synergistic effect on the development of ECCE-FBS. Encouraging women, through good education, to participate more actively in the formal labor market is not only a sound economic strategy but also a strategy for ECCE-FBS. (MN)

Women, Work and Early Childhood: The Nexus in Developed and Developing Countries

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UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood

Women, Work, and Early Childhood: The Nexus in Developed and Developing Countries (I)

The topic is treated in two parts, continuing in the next issue. The first part covers the relationship between women in the labour force and government policy for supporting young children and their working parents. The hypothesis is that the relationship may not be so pronounced in developing countries as it has been in developed countries, given the differing employment status of working mothers in the two regions. Data from developed countries are presented and discussed, while data on female employment in developing countries and a discussion of implications for early childhood and family support policies will be presented in the next issue.

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) and family benefits and services (FBS)[1] for parents with young children in industrialised countries have developed in tandem with increased female participation in the labour market. As more mothers work outside the home, the question arises of how to take care of young children left at home.

Government responses to the need and demand for ECCE-FBS in developed countries have varied, however. Those with a strong conviction concerning gender equality and social democracy (e.g., the Nordic countries) have responded swiftly and positively with measures to reconcile the needs of work and family. But countries with liberal and market-oriented ideologies (e.g., the US, UK and Australia) have tended, until recently, to leave the matter up to individual families, minimising government involvement. Approaches also vary: Some countries have focused on supporting parents (both mothers and fathers), others on providing services for children.

Female employment is certainly not the only factor influencing the development of ECCE-FBS in industrialised countries. Child protection was an important concern in the early 20th century, as were the enhancement of child development and the need to prepare children for primary school. Recently, the growing value placed on education as the foundation of the child's lifelong learning has driven many developed countries to step up their policy attention to ECCE-FBS.

At a minimum, the presence of more working mothers raised governments' awareness of the issues surrounding ECCE-FBS, which were previously considered to be of private concern. In many cases, growing female labour forces led governments to examine the ECCE-FBS issue more closely across sectors at the public policy level.[2] To be sure, rising female employment is among the most frequently mentioned rationales for government involvement in ECCE-FBS.[3]

With the greying and shrinking of their populations, the expansion of their service sectors and rising levels of women's education, developed countries are likely to see female employment rise even more rapidly, and policies to reconcile work and family responsibilities will continue to be critical to their economic and social strategies.[4] The causality between female employment and the expansion of ECCE-FBS is difficult to quantify, but the interrelationship is indisputable.

Can the same pattern be expected in developing countries, with increased female employment spurring government concern and support for ECCE-FBS? Before answering this question, one particular aspect of the link between female employment and ECCE-FBS must be understood. The fact is that the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS does not arise with all types of female employment, but mainly with that which requires the mother to be absent from home and which makes it impossible for her to be a full-time caretaker at home. Speaking in terms of employment status, wage/salaried employment is more likely to increase the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS than self-employed or contributing/unpaid family work.[5]

This, of course, does not mean that mothers in non-wage jobs, employed around the house or in the neighbourhood, do not have the need for ECCE-FBS. In fact any working mother, regardless of the type of work she does, has the burden of combining the two responsibilities, at least more than a father would in the same situation. And given the greater hardships often associated with non-wage work (e.g., longer, irregular hours, labour-intensive work, seasonal, low-paying situations), not to mention the poverty factor, the need for ECCE-FBS among mothers in self-employed or in unpaid family work would be equal to if not greater than that of mothers in wage jobs.

But a distinction must be made between demand and need for ECCE-FBS. A need does not necessarily translate into a demand, unless the agent responsible for supply is led to perceive the need and feel liable for meeting the need. In this regard, wage work is

[1] Maternity, paternity, parental leaves, tax benefits, child allowances, etc.

[2] Callister, P., & Podmore, V.N. (1995). *Striking a balance: Families, work and early childhood education*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Education Research.

[3] Olmsted, P., & Weikart, D. (1989). *How nations serve young children: Profiles of child care and education in 14 countries*. Michigan: The High/Scope Press. / *OECD Country Notes (1999), Early Childhood Education and Care Policy* in the Netherlands, Portugal, the US, and Sweden. http://www.oecd.org / *Starting Strong: Early childhood education and care* (2001). Paris: OECD.

[4] *OECD Employment Outlook* (2001). Paris: OECD.

[5] These are three broad categories of employment status recognised by ILO. "Employees are all those workers who hold the type of job defined as paid employees, where the incumbents hold explicit or implicit employment contracts which give them a basic remuneration which is not directly dependent upon the revenue of the unit for which they work." Self-employed are "jobs where the remuneration is directly dependent upon the profits derived from the goods and services produced and in this capacity have engaged one or more persons to work for them." Contributing family workers are "who hold a self employment job in a market oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household." Unpaid family worker works " without pay in a business operated by a related person who lives in the same household." A high proportion of own-account workers operating their own economic enterprise indicates slow growth in the formal sector and rapid growth of the informal sector. A high proportion of unpaid family workers is associated with slow development, a weak job market and a rural economy. An economy with a large informal sector tends to have a higher proportion of self-employment and unpaid family work (*Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001-02*. Geneva: ILO).

more advantageous than self-employed or contributing/unpaid family work in that it is more likely to be recognised as work. In addition, it takes place in an environment where collective action and negotiation for workers' welfare is possible and more frequent. From this point of view, if the mother is employed around the house or in the neighbourhood, despite the need on her part, the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS would not be so great as it would if her workplace is located away from home.

From the sole perspective of female employment status,[6] the question of whether developing countries will follow the same pattern as developed countries in ECCE-FBS issues seems to have both *Yes* and *No* answers. Labour market researchers predict that developing countries will eventually follow a similar pattern of changes in labour force participation to that of developed countries.[7] Data show that female workers in developing countries are indeed moving away from the informal sector (e.g., agriculture) to manufacturing, services and commerce, out of unpaid family workers status and into wage employment.[8] It is thus predicted that the number of women working outside the home in developing countries will also eventually increase, with a corresponding increase in the perceived need and, importantly, demand for ECCE-FBS.

However, the linkage between female employment and government support for ECCE-FBS in developing countries is likely to solidify more slowly. This prognosis has little to do with the actual size of the female labour force in developed and developing countries, as there is no particular difference. For example, in 1998, the female labour force as a percentage of total labour force in low-income, middle-income, low and middle-income and high-income countries was 40.6%, 38.6%, 40.1%, and 42.9%, respectively.[9]

Concerning the *status* of female employment, however, a wide gap is seen between North and South which is expected to underlie a difference in perceived demand for ECCE-FBS between the two regions. In developed countries, most women work in wage jobs, while in developing countries, especially in Asia-Pacific and in Africa, most are assumed to have contributing/unpaid family worker status. In developed countries, women's participation in the labour market began with paid jobs in factories, offices and service activities that sprang up as industrialisation swept across most of Western Europe and North America in the early 20th century. As shown in Table 1 below, as early as the 1940s and 1950s, most female workers in developed countries already had salaried status.

Table 1: Economically Active Female Population by Industry Division in Selected Developed Countries (1946-1960), as a % of all industry[10]

Country	Year	Industry Division			
		Employers /own account workers[11]	Employees / salaried	Unpaid family workers	Not class-ified
Finland	1960	8.9	64.7	26.2	-
France	1954	13.8	58.0	25.9	2.1
Germany	1961	7.3	70.6	22.0	-
Italy	1951	11.0	58.0	24.2	6.7
Norway	1946	11.5	88.4	-	-
Sweden	1950	10.6	83.8	5.1	0.4

Data source: *Yearbook of labour statistics: Retrospective edition on population censuses 1945-1989.* (1990). Geneva: ILO

In the case of Norway, 88.4% of economically active women were salaried workers in 1946, and this rate was reached even within an overall female labour force participation of less than 25%,[12] implying that salaried jobs were what drew early female workers to the labour market. It is also interesting to note that Norway and Sweden, two of the most advanced countries in terms of the government support for ECCE-FBS, had the highest rates of women working in salaried employment. In Sweden, the economically active female population with salaried status already reached 96.5% by 1985. According to recent OECD data, the proportion of female employment in unpaid family work is falling steadily in 11 out of 13 of its member countries.[13]

(to be continued in Brief no. 5)

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[6] The perceived demand for ECCE-FBS could also be influenced by the availability of other family members to care for children while their parents are away for work, cultural attitudes and traditions about women and their participation in the society, and the degree to which women perceive their status to come from being mothers, not to mention the country's ideological and political system.

[7] *Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001-02.* Geneva: ILO.

[8] This trend is particularly pronounced in Latin America and the Caribbean.

[9] *World Development Indicators (2002).* The World Bank. When the labour force participation rates of women aged between 25-54 years are compared, developing countries show even a higher rate than developed countries: The average of 21 developing countries in the Low Human Development status identified by Human Development Report 2001 (UNDP) in the year between 1995 and 2000 was 78.4%, whereas that of 24 developed countries in 1999/2000 (except Greece, of which data were from 1998) was 72%. Data calculated from *Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001-02.* Geneva: ILO.

[10] Calculated from data provided in the Yearbook. Data from other developed countries, which are not included in the Table, show the same pattern.

[11] An employer/own account worker is a person who operates his/her own economic enterprise or engaged independently in a profession or trade.

[12] The rates of economically active female population as a percentage of the total in the other countries in the years shown were: 39.3% (Finland), 34% (France), 37% (Germany), 25.4% (Italy), and 29.7% (Sweden).

[13] In relevant time series data from 1990-1997, with a median of 1.3 % (Australia) in a range of from 0.2 % (in the US) to 24% (in Greece). Reference: *World Employment Report: Life at work in the information economy* (2001). Geneva: ILO, p. 21. Data: *OECD: Employment Outlook 2000.* Paris: OECD.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood

Women, Work, and Early Childhood: The Nexus in Developed and Developing Countries (II)

(continued from Brief no. 4)

Most female workers in developing countries, particularly in Asia-Pacific and Africa, *do not* have wage jobs. Female workers in these regions work mostly in agriculture, with a status of unpaid family worker. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of the economically active female population is in agriculture (68%).[1] In Asia and the Pacific, this trend is more pronounced the lower the income level of the country, with about 78% of female workers in least developed countries in the region employed in agriculture (Table 2).

Table 2: Female Labour Force by Industry Division in Asia and the Pacific (1990), as a % of all industry[2]

Income group	Industry Division		
	Agriculture	Industry	Services
Least developed	77.8	13.5	8.6
Low income	73.7	14.2	11.9
Middle income	65.7	15.3	18.8
High income	9.9	26.4	63.5
ESCAP[3] total	64.6	15.7	19.6

Reference: *Statistics on women in Asia and the Pacific* 1999. UN.
Data source: *Economically Active Population 1950-2010* (1996). Geneva: ILO. / *World Population Prospect: The 1998 Revision*, UN Population Division.

According to available data on employment status in some developing countries, female workers engaged in wage jobs make up less than 10% (Table 3). The preponderance of female workers in non-wage jobs, however, is not consistent across all developing countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of women who are unpaid family workers has dropped considerably, with most female workers now either wage earners or self-employed. But a burgeoning informal sector for female workers in this region[4] suggests that female workers counted as having wage status may in fact not be in regular employee situations, but in non-core situations, such as those working from home or domestic and casual workers.

Table 3: Female Employment by Status in Selected Developing Countries (1991-97), as a % of all employment status

Country	Year	Employment by Status		
		Wage/salaried	Self-employed	Contributing family workers
Bangladesh	1991	5.2	6.4	83.3
	1996	8.7	7.8	77.3
Benin	1992	2.6	63.8	28.6
Ethiopia	1994	4.0	25.4	69.6
	1999	6.8	33.1	59.5
Uganda	1991	4.6	25.4	53.3
	1994	6.7	39.1	54.0

Data source: *Key indicators of the labour market 2001-02*. Geneva: ILO.

The proportion of non-wage female workers in developing countries is assumed to be greater than suggested by available data. In most countries, statistics on the informal sector come solely from urban areas, and many rural women working informally are not counted. Furthermore, most women in developing countries are engaged in economic activities that do not normally figure in labour statistics or are not recognised as work at all, such as subsistence agriculture and housework. Although these activities are vital to society and to household economy, they have no recognised market value.

The main conclusions from these observations are, first, that mothers in the developing world cannot be assumed to be freely available to serve as full-time child caretakers and, second, that the demand for ECCE-FBS[5] is huge among working mothers in developing countries. This demand, however, is hidden.[6] In order to motivate governments to increase their involvement and investment in ECCE-FBS, this hidden demand must be exposed. To this end, labour force statistics should be made more gender-sensitive; specifically, by assigning market values to non-wage jobs and unpaid family work -- to the goods and services women produce at home (Myers, 1992).[7]

Data should also be available to show that mothers performing non-wage work are not fully available for childcare functions. The irony is that despite their difficulties, mothers in non-wage jobs, especially little-educated rural mothers engaged in agricultural work, tend

[1] *African Development Indicators* (2002). Washington, DC: The World Bank.
[2] Calculated from the data presented in the noted reference.
[3] The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the regional arm of the UN Secretariat for the Asian/Pacific region with 52 member states (and nine associated members).
[4] From 47.4% in 1990 to 50% in 1998. *World employment report: Life at work in the information economy* (2001). Geneva: ILO.
[5] Early childhood care and education (ECCE) and family benefits and services (FBS).
[6] In rural areas, the availability of relatives and grandparents also helps hide the demand for ECCE-FBS.
[7] Myers, R. (1992). *The twelve who survive*. London: Routledge.

to combine work and family responsibilities more often than those in wage jobs.[8] Many of these women simply have no other choice, but their carrying of the double burden perpetuates the myth that "stay-at-home" mothers are available to take care of children and have no particular need for ECCE-FBS.

These observations have a few implications for ECCE-FBS policy in developing countries.

First, family support measures such as parental leave, granted in developed countries to parents of young children under age two[9], are unlikely to be available in developing countries, at least in the near future. The reason is that apart from obvious obstacles such as resource constraints, governments in developing countries have difficulty delivering such family support to the target population because of the technical problem of mapping the presence of mothers and fathers working in the informal sector in the absence of contractual arrangements. Parental leave systems require a sophisticated administration system tracking the parents' employment conditions and status.

Second, given a relatively high per-child cost, institutional services for children under three are also out of reach in most developing countries. As far as the care and education of young children in their first years is concerned, one feasible option is to educate parents in the basics of cleaning, feeding and interacting with children. Parent education, which does not require a sophisticated administration system, as it can be delivered non-formally, can have a substantial positive impact on early childhood development by making parents more effective early childhood educators. Parent education does not help solve the problem of the parents' non-availability but it makes them become more effective early childhood educators when available.

But, as argued above, mothers in disadvantaged situations, the main target population of parent education programmes, are not easily available to attend classes. For this reason, home-based programmes have been devised to mobilise mothers to serve as collective early childhood educators for groups of children in neighbourhood communities. Such an approach allows mothers to work while their children are under the care of someone with at least a minimum of training. However, home-based and parent education programmes should not be considered permanent alternatives to government spending on professional care and education for disadvantaged children. In addition, in order to ensure quality, these programmes, too, require government support and involvement to build the necessary administrative infrastructure.

Finally, in the long term, investment in the education of girls and women will have a synergistic effect on the development of ECCE-FBS. Mothers' education levels have been shown to have a negative correlation with their fertility rates: educated mothers produce fewer children. Smaller families in turn allow the government to increase per-child expenditures for early childhood services, thereby improving access and quality. Educated mothers do not require extensive parent education, nor do they need to be convinced of its importance as much as uneducated mothers do. Furthermore, educated mothers are far more likely to be employed in the formal sector,[10] and their presence as visible contributors to the economy increases the perceived demand for ECCE-FBS and prompts the government to deliver FBS services.

Government investment is a political decision arising from the determination of priorities. To trigger it, demand must be clearly communicated. Dire statistics on child development (e.g., infant mortality) may reveal the need for ECCE-FBS, but need alone, unfortunately, is not enough to win government investment. While mothers are not the sole beneficiaries of ECCE-FBS, they are the strategic beneficiaries in the sense that their voice can communicate the demand. In this regard, encouraging women, through good education, to participate more actively in the formal labour market is not only a sound economic strategy, but also a good strategy for ECCE-FBS. Likewise, investment in ECCE-FBS to reinforce positive child development is a sound economic strategy, given that it will translate into long-term savings on remedial social and educational programmes.

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[8] *Zambia Demographic Health Survey, 1996*. Central Statistics Zambia.
[9] Or at most age three.

[10] Across EU member states, mothers with high levels of education are 2-3 times more likely to work when they have a young child than mothers with a low level of education.

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