

The Invisible Workers:

Women's Unrecognised Contribution to the Economy

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More than in any other area, it is in the recording of the work done by women, that serious inaccuracies and measurement failures occur. As a result, their participation in the economy is undermined. Census after Census, women's contribution has been rendered invisible by failing to quantify their work inputs, especially in agriculture and the unorganised sector. There are basically two kinds of work. Work for which payment is received and work for which no payment is made. Women are known to work longer hours than men and to participate in the work force to a far greater extent than is measured by the data gathered in the census. But a lot of the work they do is unrecognised, leave alone rewarded with equal remuneration. Thus, our mechanisms of data collection cause a loss of significant information.⁽¹⁾ This has an impact on the status of women in the society, their opportunities in public life and the gender blindness of development policies.

Traditionally, men spend most of their time on tasks for which payment is received or tasks that are clearly within the realm of "economic activity." Hence, there is not much

variation in the percentage of men reported as workers (roughly 50 per cent of men), regardless of the methodology used for data collection. However, while a large number of women work outside the home and are remunerated for the work they do, most women spend several hours doing work for which no payment is received. "Men are concentrated in the market-oriented side of the continuum of work and women in the statistically less visible, non-monetised subsistence production and domestic side; they account for 60 per cent of the unpaid family workers, and 98 per cent of those engaged in domestic work."⁽²⁾

Work for which no payment is received includes two categories of tasks:

a) Tasks that are considered as

necessary for survival but which are not included in "economic activity" and in calculations of National Income in any country, that is, domestic work like cooking, cleaning, child care, caring for the sick or elderly or handicapped. These are arduous tasks that have to be performed on a daily basis and from which there is no respite. These are also tasks that are traditionally perceived as "women's works" or roles within the home, or work of a housewife, that is, women engaged in these tasks are reported as "not working". UNDP's Human Development Report for the year 1995 estimates that once a woman has a child, she can expect to devote 3.3 more hours a day to unpaid household work, while her paid work declines by only about one hour. And a woman with a child under five can expect to



Women transplanting rice

1) Aasha Kapur Mehta, "Roman Indices for Developing Countries: A Gender Empowerment Measure," *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 26, 1996.

2) IBRD, *Gender and Poverty in India: A World Bank Country Study*.