

National Consultation on ‘Current Employment Strategies and Women’s Work’

July 6-7, 2009

**Organized by International Labour Organisation, New Delhi;
Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India;
In partnership with Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi**

Summary of discussions

Agenda

July 6, 2009:

Inaugural Session

Chair: Mr. S. Krishnan, Special Secretary; Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Welcome Remarks: Ms. Leyla Tegmo-Reddy; Director, ILO SRO-New Delhi for South Asia and ILO Representative in India.

Inaugural Address: Mr. G.K. Chadha, Member, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council & Chief Ex. Officer, South Asian University

Special Address: Mr. Y.K. Modi, ILO Governing Body Member (Employers)

Special Address: Mr. N.M. Adyanthaya, ILO Governing Body Member (Workers)

Special Remarks: Ms. Jane Hodges, Director, Bureau of Gender Equality, ILO

Keynote Address: Mr. Harish Rawat, Minister of State for Labour and Employment, GoI

Chairperson's Remarks: Mr. S. Krishnan, Special Secretary, MoLE, GoI

Vote of Thanks: Ms. Reiko Tsushima, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO SRO-South Asia

Session 1: Emerging Trends for Women's Work in the Current Growth Scenario and Issues

Chair: Mr. Atul Sarma, Member; Finance Commission

1. *Emerging Trends and Policy Suggestions:* Ms. Nirmala Banerjee; Project Director, SACHETANA
2. *The World of Women's Work in India: Regional Pattern and Perspectives:* Ms. Saraswati Raju; Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
3. *Employment Trends for Indian Women:* Ms. Preet Rustagi; Senior Fellow, Institute for Human Development (IHD).

Session 2: Emerging Issues Against the Background of a Changing Economy

Chair: Mr. Mahendra Dev, Chairman; Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, Ministry of Agriculture.

1. *Growing Presence of Women in Agriculture:* Ms. Aruna Kanchi, Consultant.
2. *Impact of Trade Liberalization:* Ms. Anandi Venkateshwaran, Under Secretary; Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
3. *Decent Work and the Expanding Unorganized Sector:* Ms. Jeemol Unni, Professor; Gujarat Institute of Development Research.

Session 3: Rethinking Strategies for Youth Employment particularly in the Rural Context

Chair: Ms. Jayati Chandra, Secretary (Youth Affairs), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

The Female Youth Employment Challenges and Experiments in Strategies

Speakers:

- i. Mr. Anil Bordia, Doosra Dashak
- ii. Ms. Mridul Eapen, Member; State Planning Board, Trivandrum.
- iii. Ms. Aheli Chowdhury, Josh.

July 7, 2009

Session 4: Measuring Women's Unpaid Work

Chair: Mr. Abhijit Sen, Member; Planning Commission

1. *Contribution of Women to the National Economy:* Mr. G. Raveendran, Consultant.
2. *Integrating Time Use into Macro Policies - Measurement Issues:* Ms. Lekha Chakraborty, Fellow; National Institute of Public Finance and Policy.
3. *Measuring Non-Market Work – Contribution that Matters:* Ms. Anushree Sinha, Senior Fellow; National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

Session 5: Strengths and Challenges Confronting SHGs and their Future Direction

Chair: Ms. Amarjeet Kaur, Secretary; All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)

1. *The Vulnerability of 'Self Help': Women and Microfinance in South India*: Ms. K. Kalpana, Centre for Development Finance (CDF) at the Institute of Financial Management Research (IFMR).
2. *Strengths and Challenges Confronting SHGs–Future Directions*: Ms. Soma Parthasarathy, Consultant
3. *Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (National Credit Fund for Women)*: Ms. Sneh Lata Kumar; Executive Director, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh

Session 6: Policy Recommendations and Way Forward

Chair: Ms. Jane Hodges, Director, Bureau of Gender Equality, ILO

Summary of Issues and Policy Solutions:

- i. Ms. Reiko Tsushima, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO
- ii. Ms. Ratna Sudarshan, Director; ISST

Discussants:

- i. Ms. Nirmala Banerjee; Project Director, SACHETANA

Vote of Thanks: Ms. Ratna Sudarshan, Director; ISST

About the Consultation

ILO, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), organised a National Consultation on Current Employment Strategies and Women's Work which brought together representatives of the government, workers, employers, academics and civil society. India's total workforce has grown to 455.7 by 2004-05. An increasing share of women in employment forms an important aspect of the current scenario of growth. The gender dimension of employment growth is an important aspect reflecting the increasing share of women's participation in the labour force and its significant contribution to household income as well as the GDP. The background papers sought to highlight the contribution women make to economic growth; changing patterns of livelihoods of households; increasing feminization in some sectors (including agriculture); the regional diversity in these trends; and emerging policy implications, in particular, with reference to international trade and agriculture. Against this background, the Consultation debated the experience of policy measures and their relevance for different groups of women workers, with a view to identify policy and operational measures to place women's productive and decent employment and as key growth strategy

Among issues that were explored, was the need to re –think strategies for youth employment especially in rural areas. There is a growing number of educated young women (and men) in rural areas without adequate access to productive employment opportunities and skills. The workshop took a deeper look at the SHG phenomenon. It also drew attention to the new sectors of employment that are emerging and women's participation therein. It is expected that the Consultation will be able to contribute significantly to the operationalisation of the National Employment Policy; build awareness around women's work in the context of the planning for the Census 2011; further discuss the implementation of some key programmes; and build the knowledge base for gender sensitive macro economic policy making. We anticipate that these discussions will lead to the identification of the kinds of public investments, or institutional arrangements, and in which specific locations, through which women workers' contributions could be enhanced and negative impacts on women's capacity be countered.

Summary of Discussion: National Consultation on ‘Current Employment Strategies and Women’s Work’; July 6 – 7, 2009.

Inaugural Session

Ms. Leyla Tegmo-Reddy; Director, ILO SRO-New Delhi welcomed participants and briefly presented the history to this consultation. Through 2007-08 the ILO assisted the Ministry of Labour and Employment in framing the National Employment Policy and embedding ‘decent work’ norms into policy, through numerous consultations with stakeholders ranging from the media and civil society organizations to workers, employers and government bodies. This process of gender mainstreaming has to be accompanied by recognition of the diversity of women – in terms of age, region, sector, caste and class – comprising policy audience. She pointed out that it was Dr. Devaki Jain who first drew attention to the differences in connotations of ‘work’ and ‘employment’. By shifting focus from the latter to the former, women’s contributions to the economy – market and non-market – can get captured.

2009 is the ILO’s 90th year of existence. Gender equality is an objective that will be fulfilled only with convergence between economic efficiency, growth and social justice. There is a hope that the deliberations over these two days would be able to reach and influence the thinking of those engaged with top level budgetary planning by the government.

The Inaugural Address was given by **Dr G.K. Chadha, Member, Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council & Chief Executive Officer, South Asian University**. Dr Chadha congratulated the MoLE, the ILO and ISST for launching this venture. There is an overwhelming presence of women in the informal economy, leading to their exploitation – both by employers and themselves. Their level of engagement in the agricultural, manufacturing and services sector has increased manifold in the last two decades. At this juncture, one can note the differential rewards and working conditions for rural female/rural male and urban male/female workers. Education has a key role to play in determining opportunities and wages. As India’s level of integration with global markets increases, yardsticks of survival and competition change. The future holds great challenges in production and exchange. For example, the characteristics of agriculture are changing, and in this current scenario the low level of education of agricultural workers will prove an impediment to growth. Similarly the role of unions will be significantly altered. Sharp inter-regional differences in women’s work have to be addressed and their capacities to understand technologies, market strategies and price movements strengthened. Concepts like ‘precision farming’ should become everyday practices for India’s women. The inadequacies in computing women’s contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) have to be overcome and a way to formalize women’s contribution to the national economy evolved.

This was followed by the Special Address given by **Mr. Y.K. Modi, ILO Governing Body Member (Employers)** who pointed out that women comprise half the population of the country's population, and they have to be empowered for large scale societal change to take place. It is through education that women can become 'change agents'. Issues at the ground level – the absence of toilets in rural schools – that hinder girls from attending schools have to be tackled. Skill development is another necessity – women have to be trained in skills needed by the market i.e. that possess employability. Micro enterprise/ self-employment has two drawbacks: the availability of finance and training about entrepreneurship. Alongside strengthening institutions, mindsets also need to be altered and broadened. A modified family orientation is required for both men and women.

A Special Address was then given by **Mr. N.M. Adyanthaya, ILO Governing Body Member (Workers)**. Gender equality has always been a national concern (Articles 15 and 39 of the Constitution). In 1992, the National Commission of Women was set up to address women's concerns. Even the Presidential Address this year after the new government was elected in June 4, 2009, emphasized issues of female literacy, 1/3rd reservation for women in central government jobs and a 50% reservation in *panchayats*. However, more than just top down legislations are needed to bring about gender equality. A bottom up, regionally sensitive policy architecture becomes necessary. Deep seated prejudices affect women's status both in the workplace and at home. Therefore economic stimulus alone cannot bring about social equality. A culturally sensitive response is mandatory. We need more research to understand what determines women's work participation including socio- cultural and economic factors.

Statutory regulations leave a large percentage of women out of their ambit - women working in the textile sector, in tobacco industries, in agriculture and other forms of home based work. Women's work is concentrated in the lower end of the value chain, and remuneration is unequal resulting in differential wages between men and women. Further, when newer, labour saving technologies become available, women are often the first to lose their jobs. The occupational risks and health hazards faced by women in the work space also render them more vulnerable. Linkages between levels of education and types of work are not direct, but complex. A rise in female employment cannot be immediately interpreted as an improvement in women's life conditions. Social and economic equality have to be addressed simultaneously; the pillars of 'decent work' upheld.

This was followed by Special Remarks offered by **Ms. Jane Hodges, Director, Bureau of Gender Equality, ILO** who emphasized that policy coherence is the key if we hope to implement the ILO's Decent Work agenda alongside the Declaration on Social Justice for Fair Globalisation. The International Labour Conference held in May 2009 was a wonderful opportunity to take stock of the advances made in this regard, and future challenges. 'Gender'

has been discussed as an independent topic in the ILO since 1985, and India's achievements in establishing legislative frameworks, policies and monitoring bodies aimed at ensuring gender equality has been exemplary. Yet we find that challenges of job creation, equal access, pay differentials, disproportionate representation in poorly paid work, the vulnerabilities of the informal economy, HIV AIDS and the current economic recession, remain. These road blocks continue to undermine and jeopardize the fragile gains of gender empowerment.

Women in different parts of the world are faced with different crises, although significant commonalities also exist. For example, ageing societies in Europe are searching for ways to boost work participation of older women. In Africa, the problem is one of access to decent and productive work, a large informal economy and implementation of the law. On one hand, while economic opportunities have increased for women in China, poor working conditions and low pay continue to prevail. Gender commissions in Latin America have proved to be a unique forum through which a tripartite social dialogue between workers, employers and the state can take place. In the Gulf countries, the issue is one of better female representation in the workforce. In India, concerns over social protection, the national economic policy, the informal economy and affirmative action have shaped the debate on gender and work. The Committee on Gender Equality at the ILC, 2009 concluded that there was a crucial need for strengthening research agendas and knowledge bases across the world. It is hoped that this Consultation will feed positively into the G20 discussions at Philadelphia later in the year.

The Keynote Address was given by **Mr. Harish Rawat, Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Government of India**. He stated that gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Inclusive growth has always been an objective of the Government of India. There are a number of schemes and instituted laws to ensure women's participation in the economic and political mainstream. For example, the Women's Reservation Bill seeking to reserve seats in Parliament, and the now 50% reservation for women in panchayats are directed at enhancing women's effective political participation; while schemes such as crèches and working women's hostels seek to empower working women.

The Chairperson followed this with his remarks. **Mr. S. Krishnan, Special Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India** said that the NCEUS's (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector) report states that women's work participation lags behind in proportion to female population. He suggested a more state specific approach to the dilemmas of women in employment. Education is key. It has been seen that areas of comparatively higher education report lower rates of fertility and low IMR. The high percentage of women workers with less than 5 years of schooling is an unacceptable statistic and has to be reversed. Formal skill training is almost entirely concentrated in the southern and western states of India. (63 % of trained labour force is in the South and West of the country, as per NCEUS). Vocational training is an important avenue of value addition. The present emphasis

on self employment and enterprise development is laudatory, but self employment initiatives have to be guarded from degenerating into part time/casual employment. There is no easy détente between top down and bottom up approaches to development. The latter too can be prescriptive, and the former always stands corrected by demand. There needs to be a careful balance.

Ms Reiko Tsushima, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO offered the vote of thanks.

Session 1: Emerging Trends for Women's Work in the Current Growth Scenario and Issues

Dr Atul Sarma, Member, Finance Commission, chaired the session.

Ms. Nirmala Banerjee; Project Director, SACHETANA gave the opening presentation. She argued that gender empowerment as a goal is important not only for women themselves but also national development as a whole. At this juncture, women's work is vital for ensuring enhanced productivity in agriculture and also perhaps services. Any National Employment Policy must address women as workers across different sectors as well as the region, class and community based diversities that exist among Indian women. Gender construction – devising social rationales/mores to control women's labour by restricting mobility and limiting access to resources – is the biggest impediment to gender equality in the country. The state is a co-conspirator in this regulatory exercise, defining women's primary roles as home makers best suited for part-time, home based employment, and in effect transferring welfare responsibilities of care and health to women. Therefore, making market opportunities available to women is the first step towards altering gender relations. For empowerment to take place, women need control over their own labour as well as opportunities for market work.

Women's employment has seen a consistent increase since the period 1999 – 2000 to 2005, although this is expected to suffer a setback, particularly in the case of urban and rural women engaged in manufacturing. There is a move towards informalization: between 2000 and 2005, the share of casual work for women in manufacturing had grown and regular jobs shrunk. Small and medium manufacturing enterprises function at sub-optimal levels. In an attempt to maintain lower capital-labour ratios, on site production is supplemented by subcontracting work to home based women workers. Workers are paid extremely low wages (often less than the minimum wage) and it is these women – unskilled, offering low productivity - who are most vulnerable to the recession and stand to lose their jobs.

Rural women's workforce participation is nearly twice that of urban women, although their age distribution differs – rural female WFPRs peak at 40-49 years and urban female WFPRs at 30-39

years. State wise female WFPRs are widely disparate. Given the marginal size of holdings and low productivity of Indian agriculture, cultivation has to be supplemented by other livelihood activities. As men move out of rural areas, cultivation becomes women's work (72% of women workers are engaged in agriculture). However, this assumption of responsibilities is not accompanied by rights to land, and by extension, government facilities for extension services and subsidized inputs. Cottage/village industries have become moribund in the face of stiff competition from foreign and domestic capital vying for the same markets and inputs. To combat this stagnation, women are increasingly taking up home based manufacturing work like beedi rolling, embroidery and zari work in addition to traditional chores, resulting in a net increase in women's drudgery.

This large amount of time spent by women on productive work is ignored by policymakers during their assessments of women's work. The reason why official data systems continue to underestimate women workers is because it cannot deal with the average woman's multi-tasked working day. However, even when their work remains unmeasured, the state must be aware of its volume and value for family livelihoods and survival. Acknowledgement of this fact needs to be followed by policy measures to increase the productivity of women's work and/or alleviate its load. Genuine economic empowerment will necessitate human resource building through education and technical training. Existing policies need to be gender mainstreamed.

India has a large and young labour supply. The young worker (14 – 25) population is estimated to be currently more than a quarter of the total population, and expected to increase its share over the next decade. Instead of harnessing this domestic dividend by proffering exhaustive technical education, there is chronic unemployment. The Indian economy's primary challenge today is to increase the productivity and upgrade the types of work undertaken by women. Women can be encouraged to produce oilseeds, a step that could lower India's import bill for edible oil and restore a more equitable balance of trade in primary exports. Only by bestowing the right to property will women embrace their role as farmers wholeheartedly. This will grant them access to subsidies, and given adequate training, will increase competitiveness. Women's Empowerment Zones (WEZs), a special manufacturing zone for garments, food processing, packaging, sports/leather goods – industries known to employ predominantly women – could be set up on the condition that 75% of the total employment will go to women. Companies will also be required to provide workers with training in exchange for tax holidays and relaxed labour laws.

Women's employment in the tertiary sector has also increased, but further expansion has been hampered by restrictions on mobility and lack of training. Policy interventions like safe night shelters and hostels will go a long way in facilitating working women in their pursuits. There is also a need to make vocational training more accessible. At present, poor, older women find themselves excluded given that most institutes ask for secondary education as a mandatory

admission requirement. SHGs are another instrument for overcoming savings' bottlenecks, accessing financial institutions and resisting gender oppression. The SHG revolution must bring young, unmarried women under its rubric because they possess the time and education to make enterprises successful.

In conclusion, the NREGA was signaled as offering vast opportunities to bring women into the development mainstream. Women's demands for fuel, toilets and a refurbished ICDS can be accommodated as NREGA 'works'. A percentage of the total employment created can be reserved for the rural youth.

Dr. Saraswati Raju; Professor, JNU presented and analysed regional patterns in women's work through a mapping methodology. She started by drawing attention to the fact that India being a diverse country, deriving a conceptually adequate definition of work that will take cognizance of the sharp regional variations in female work force participation rates (FWFPR), is difficult. For example, FWFPR is very low in the northern plains when compared to the rest of India. Such dramatic variations in WFPR is absent for males. FWFPRs cut across comparable poverty levels, cropping patterns and development levels, leading one to the conclusion that social factors apart from the purely economic play an important role in determining women's labour force participation. For example, although work is available and women are recognized as 'workers', they are not reported as the same.

Some education has become essential for entering the labour market and those with elementary education account for much of the recent growth in employment, even in rural India. While there is not much change in the educational levels of recent entrants into the workforce in rural areas, in urban India male workers with secondary (or more) education and women workers with elementary (or more) education are experiencing an expansion of opportunities. Overall, the percentage of illiterate and 'below primary' educated women workers are higher. The rural urban divide becomes explicit in that rural men and women workers possess similar levels of education, whereas urban women workers are less educated than their male counterparts. The city becomes a gendered location.

The feminization of agriculture is a large scale phenomenon. The percentage share of female agricultural workers and cultivators is increasing. There is high growth in the number of women working as cultivators and wage labourers in West Bengal and Haryana. Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh are experiencing a high growth in the number of women working solely as cultivators, whereas Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan see a 'high' to 'moderate' growth in female agricultural labour. This high growth rate in self-employment in backward states is a corollary of declining wage work. There is a 'substitution' of male workers by women that accompanies male out-migration in the face of a stagnant agricultural sector. The average wage

of women is far lower than that of men across the country. The all India daily wage rate for women is Rs. 34.

Slightly less than half of urban women workers are in self-employment. Although they are present everywhere, their major concentration is in northern belt; conversely the region is characterized by low level of regular salaried employment for women. A high percentage of these self-employed women are working as home based, contractual workers over and above household chores of care, cooking and cleaning. The complexity of women's world of work cannot be overstated. The issues are multi-layered. About 20 % of 'non-working' rural women cited 'social and/or religious constraints' as their biggest obstacle to taking up employment in the future. Challenging norms, in addition to creating opportunities, is the key. Some issues have to be anchored in the broader framework of developmental interventions while some require women-specific measures. All policy interventions however, have to be regionally contextualized as labour market dynamics play out differently in different environs.

Dr. Preet Rustagi; Senior Fellow, Institute for Human Development highlighted employment trends in her presentation. Indian women's participation in the labour force is increasing simultaneously with an expanding workforce and a rising proportion of the unemployed. More (and newer) employment avenues are drawing women into the workforce gradually, following a transformation of urban mindsets with demonstration effects in other areas. Educated women gain regular jobs at better returns while those with poor human capital attributes remain at the low end in self employment. The challenge lies in improving human capital endowments, skill enhancement and changing perceptions regarding women's work. Rural women's WFPR is the highest at ages 35 – 59 years; for urban women, entry into the labour market occurs between 20 – 44 years. No doubt then that the proportion of unmarried working women remains low, with a bulk of them in the 15-24 age cohort (91%). Urban India reports relatively higher percentages of unmarried women workers.

There is a continued concentration of rural women workers in agriculture and since decline for males is higher, the share of women increases. Rural manufacturing is absorbing male workers along with women while urban manufacturing is employing more women. Trade, hotels and restaurants have reported an increase in women workers both in rural and urban areas. Community, social and personal services have risen for rural women; the share of women in finance, insurance, real estate and business in urban areas has increased slightly. More specifically, the occupations in which women have proportionately larger shares are agriculture, beedi making, primary school teachers, spinners/weavers/knitters/dyers, shopkeepers and especially retail trade, maids/housekeeping services and primarily domestic servants, tailors and dressmakers, clerical jobs, salespersons, food processing and nursing/health technicians. High growth occupations in terms of women's employment in rural areas include elected legislative offices in the local panchayati raj, protective service workers, clerical and other supervisors,

telephone and telegraph operators, nursing and teachers (with a 7 % per annum growth rate of teachers in rural India). High growth occupations in terms of women's employment in urban areas are computing machine operators, scientific, medical and technical persons, jewellery and precious metal workers, administrative, executive and managerial workers, accountants, auditors and so on. Most of these women are young, educated beyond secondary schooling and even up to graduation and above. Many of them are unmarried as well.

However, majority of the urban, regular and salaried female workers are in the unorganised sector, with limited social security benefits and extremely vulnerable working conditions. More than half of the poor, urban, regular women workers are employed with private households as domestic help. Major differences remain in wage incomes of men and women. 80% of new entrants into the workforce have no opportunity for skill training. The significance of the National Skill Development Mission (investing in education and skills of the relevant kind keeping in mind the nature of job growth in the economy - a range of soft skills; computer application; retail management) is immense, not only to address the skill deficit but overcome some of the labour demand – supply mismatch. Women are accepting uncommon job profiles that involve night work in the IT sector, BPOs and call centres are changing perceptions and aspirations. However, most of this is limited to urbanized, metropolitan areas. The NREGA could be a harbinger of change in the rural context, with government employment for women.

These presentations were followed by comments and questions from the floor. **Ms. Amarjeet Kaur, AITUC** suggested that more attention needs to be paid to the issue of migration. Earlier, distress migration would take place with families. Now women are coming into cities alone, and facing tremendous hardships. There is an urgent need for policy inputs, especially for facilities like night hostels. The increase in trafficking of informal workers needs to be checked. Secondly, the percentage of women covered under the Maternity Benefit Act is very low. Wage differentials between men and women continue to persist across the country. There are definitional problems in the Equal Remuneration Act that need to be studied. Only a greater coherence in policy can address these concerns. Thirdly, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) needs to be universalized, and its working hours expanded to reach working women from lower income groups. **Mr. Sharad Patil, Employers' Federation of India** felt that a high rate of economic growth encourages better workforce participation rates for both men and women. Similarly, an increase in education and training levels is positively correlated with a rise in employment opportunities. Fertility drops encourage women to enter the workforce. Policy can nurture these positive changes by for example, instituting paternity leave, increasing emoluments in childcare services and raising awareness. **Dr. Jeemol Unni; Professor, GIDR** suggested that Professor Raju's analysis needed to control for age. The correlation between education levels and workforce participation rate for women of 15 – 59 years is negative, given that maximum women workers have only an elementary education. However, new female

entrants to the workforce are far more educated today and these figures do not represent this development. **Dr. Mridul Eapen; Member, State Planning Board, Kerala** said that what we are increasingly confronted with is informalization. Even the state is abdicating from its responsibility of providing statutory, security benefits. Anganwadi workers are a prime example of how the state is hiring low end, part time workers and paying very low wages. Secondly, a distinction between growth levels and growth rates needs to be made. Kerala has a low *rate* of growth but is at a high growth *level*. **Dr. Rohini Somanathan; Professor, Delhi School of Economics** questioned whether one could always view the increase in female workforce participation rate as a positive development outcome. In Salem, Tamil Nadu a high female WFPR is accompanied by very low sex ratios. Secondly, there needs to be a study of the changing organization of a household following its women's entry into the work sphere, and especially with regard to nutrition. Finally, SHG formation is a complex affair, and to understand what change happens on its own and what needs state intervention requires further research. **Radhika from UNDP** commented that a combination of time and social constraints hinder the formation of SHGs and microenterprises. Single women are not considered 'ideal' borrowers because marriage will enforce a patrilocal form of residence and consequently, a shift of address and membership of the SHG. **Mr. Ajit Ghose** underlined that women's work is not recognized as economically gainful. The productivity of women's work needs to be charted. Moreover, employment conditions have to be improved, for both men and women.

Ms. Nirmala Banerjee, Project Director, SACHETANA in response said that one cannot always directly construe a positive relationship between women working and falling sex ratios. There are issues of dowry, as well as decades old fertility policies of the Tamil Nadu government, which are part of the context and which influence observed outcomes.

Session 2: Emerging Issues Against the Background of a Changing Economy

Mr. Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, Ministry of Agriculture chaired the session.

Dr. Aruna Kanchi, Consultant made a presentation on women in agriculture. Between 1993-94 and 2004-05, the number of women constituting the agricultural workforce has risen to 41.5% from 39.3%. Men are moving out of agriculture and migrating to urban areas alongside women assuming a greater responsibility for farming. Feminization of agriculture is more dramatic on the ground because data systems regularly undercount women workers. According to the latest official numbers, there are an estimated 103 million female and 146 million male workers in agriculture. Only 4 out of 15 major states - Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal - have low female participation rates as compared to the national figure. Even here the share has increased over the last decade. 64% of female agricultural workers are self-employed cultivators and 35% are casual workers. (NSS 2004-05). Therefore the bulk of women's work is unpaid. For

women this transition from paid to unpaid work means less cash in their hands, less social value for the work they do, less mobility and less visibility in statistics and more work burden. There is a gendered division of labour: women specialize in transplantation, weeding and harvesting, and especially as hired labour. Men take charge of ploughing and other mechanized activities, the sale and purchase of crop, livestock and other agricultural inputs.

The needs, constraints and problems of women agricultural workers have to be addressed if agriculture is to be rejuvenated. Gender mainstreaming in agricultural policies is urgently called for. Loss of paid jobs and deceleration in the growth of wages in the last decade has increased women's work burden. In addition to reproductive responsibilities, women now undertake diverse activities to ensure household survival including time and effort spent collecting food, fuel and fodder. Women do not have ownership rights over either resources or produce. This lack of property rights erodes their status in the household and market and also cuts off access to crucial inputs of credit (credit, even from informal sources is tied to title to land. The 11th 5 Year Plan proposes to record women's names as cultivators in revenue records where women operate the land, regardless of its ownership, and to use this as the basis for lending.), technology, irrigation and extension services. Low and gender differentiated wages is the norm in agriculture. For an hour of work women earn only 40 to 75% of the male wage. Low levels of literacy, education and skills constrain efficiency within agriculture and limit opportunities outside it. The result is the feminization of poverty.

Policy must ensure that public investment flows into rain-fed, food insecure and backward districts. Women special assistance with production, especially in accessing inputs, credit, technology and marketing. The minimum wages (1948) and equal remuneration (1976) statutes have not resulted in gender equitable wages. Two windows of opportunity to ensure this are the NREGS – provided it can meet the demand for work fully and remove all covert forms of gender discrimination – and the export sector where gender neutral wages should be implemented strictly. Public investment can also be profitably used to bring waste land into cultivation or transferred to women individually or as a group. Skill development programmes for women in agriculture have to take into account the differential needs of older (40 – 49) and younger (30-39) workers.

Even with considerable improvement in productivity, agriculture may not be able to absorb the growing rural labour force. Rural manufacturing and services of the conventional kind have so far failed to provide opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled rural women. It is the small scale and informal sector enterprises of the Khadi and Village Industries model that appear to hold opportunities for women. The need for gender mainstreaming at every stage of policy making and delivery is immediate. Gender sensitisation of government personnel, creation of capacity for the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data and an independent authority for monitoring and auditing of gender allocations are indispensable for this. A

beginning has been made by gender mainstreaming the 11th Plan policy document, and this exercise must now be extended to sectoral plans, state plans, district plans and of course into implementation.

Ms. Anandi Venkateswaran; Under Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry made a presentation on the impact of trade liberalization on women workers. She explained that the aim was to see how trade impacts women's work differently in the three sectors, and especially the 'export-driven' sectors. There is a need to evolve an employment centred growth strategy. GDP growth rates and trade dependency ratios have been high but employment growth rate was only 2.82 % between 1999 and 2004-5; a large percentage of people remain below the poverty line. The only way to overcome this paradox is through a growth strategy that achieves efficiency in growth delivery and growth sustenance by creating new employment opportunities as well as linking the marginalized to employment opportunities.

A look at sectoral data reveals the low contribution of agriculture to GDP. Low productivity combined with high domestic farm supports and tariffs of developed countries make trade in agriculture unviable. It has become immensely important for India to improve agricultural production, provide subsidies and widen the domestic market base. This globalised world ensures that it is not solely a country's own imperatives that dictate production, consumption and employment trends in the economy. The maximum fallout of a fall in external demand is experienced by unskilled workers with no alternative livelihood strategies. At present, oil imports look set to increase. Areas under groundnut oil cultivation in Gujarat, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh have fallen. The government can attempt to right this imbalance by encouraging oilseeds production at home, primarily a woman's crop (2.7 million women - 45.7% of total growers). 92% of oil growers in Kerala are women. Falling employment in tea for example, can be linked to falling productivity of tea and India losing its global export share. Food grains like pulses, cereals, rice (basmati), plantation crops and cash crops provide extensive employment opportunities for women. The relationship between trade and female employment becomes apparent when the preponderance of women workers in food grains, cotton, tobacco and textiles is viewed against declining primary exports. Women's concentration in a few industries whose international markets are highly contested renders them more vulnerable. For example, textile exports directed to US/EU markets have fallen post-recession, badly affecting the 33.17 million people directly employed in the sector (2008-9). Thus there is an urgent need for diversification of export destinations. 96.7% of silk imports are from China today. This has thrown traditional, Varanasi weavers out of their livelihoods. There has been a decline in the share of manufacturing to GDP from 33% in the 1990s to 20% in 2006-7. Manufacturing is the second largest employer in the economy after agriculture, but with liberalization, trade and transport have shown high growth rates in employment pushing manufacturing down to rank fourth in terms of growth in employment. When share of a manufactured product for example, chemicals as a percentage of total manufacturing exports increased, wage share of that industry

viz chemicals also rose. In this context, we can say that wage share and export shares have shown unidirectional trends. Such trends were noticed in the case of non-metallic products and transport as well.

To boost manufacturing and investment the government has set up special economic zones. Though the trend of women in low-skilled jobs has continued in the SEZs, 'new generation' SEZs are employing unskilled, adolescent girls and providing them with training. Some companies are also paying an education allowance for skills' upgradation and reducing attrition rates. Stimulus packages for women oriented sectors in SEZs - longer tax holidays, social safety nets for a certain number of days' job - . A high percentage of female employment in the SEZs is offset by the low-skilled, contractual nature of work. No discourse on Indian economy can be complete without reflecting on the contribution of services sector. Women posit a large presence in the hospitality, computer applications and health sector.

Gender is a non-trade issue in the WTO. However gender-sensitive products – where a significant proportion of the total population of rural female labour is employed in its production - can be designated 'special products' in agriculture and less than full reciprocity (LTFR) in tariff reductions sought for non-agricultural products. Since women have a strong presence in cotton hosiery (Tirupur), woolen knitwear (Ludhiana), gems and jewelry (Surat/Jaipur) and leather (Agra, Kanpur) industries, giving notification as centres of excellence and setting up growth poles around these clusters would go a long way in boosting women employment. Policymakers should seek to make sectoral interventions in order to link fiscal and export incentives with provisions of social benefits for women.

Dr. Jeemol Unni; Professor, Gujarat Institute of Development Research next made a presentation on decent work and the unorganized sector. 'Decent work' provides a broader and more generous definition of social protection. There are 96.6 million workers in the informal economy today who fall outside the ambit of any formal social security measure. Both employers and own account enterprises/workers are integrated into the global and local economy through sub-contracting value chains. The state, civil society, private sector and employer work (in tandem or separately, depending on institutional arrangements) through social security measures (basic, economic and social) to cushion the worker against structural shocks. These entitlements will differ markedly according to whether the worker is self employed, own account or home based/subcontracted. There is a need for economic policies (credit and incentives) and social policies addressed to own account enterprises functioning with limited fixed capital and unpaid family workers. Policy measures should include access to credit, improving market access and competitiveness, a focus on enterprise development, skill formation and skill upgradation for own account workers.

The NREGA has brought great relief to rural India and if convergence with other development programmes like the National Rural Health Mission could yield cascading benefits. Inclusion of skilled workers in the programme – dais, female anganwadi workers and home based women workers – would have a revitalizing effect. NREGA workers should also be entitled to social security benefits and health and life insurances. The Minimum Wages Act still awaits meaningful implementation. There is no national level floor wage. On the other hand, the National Social Security for Unorganized Sector Act carries no mention of child care or maternity. Rural infrastructure – electrification, rural connectivity, telecom lines - needs to be given a boost and the Bharat Nirman Yojana can be the vehicle for this objective.

State benefits to tackle poverty alleviation can be of several kinds. The ‘Commodity Line’ provides for the basic minimum of food, clothing and shelter. The ‘Labour Line’ initiates public works like the NREGA to provide wage employment. The ‘Cash Line’ can be of two types - direct cash transfers or conditional cash transfers and each implicitly carries separate (some would argue, mutually exclusive) agendas of welfare and development. Direct cash transfers have a fairly narrow objective of providing income to cross the poverty threshold but whether it will lead to a ‘dependence on doles’ syndrome is debatable. Conditional cash transfers are very popular in Latin American countries like Brazil (*‘bolsa familia’*) and Mexico (*‘opportunitides’*), and conditional on keeping children in school, developing a specific skill set and so on. The emerging issue for ‘Tomorrow’s Debate’ is the question of Universal Vs Targeted and Cash Vs Schemes. Arguments for universal cash transfers are based on the finding that narrow targeting is wasteful; a multiplicity of schemes is wasteful; and that the market system does work. Arguments against are based on the sense that in a multi caste, political party, state, segmented lab market: multiple solutions are required to reach all. One answer that fits all cannot be the modus-operandi for any successful anti poverty programme in India. Moreover, cash does not guarantee supplementary inputs: skill, infrastructure, market, technology, institutions.

These presentations were followed by questions and commenst from the floor.

Ms. Jane Hodges, Director, Bureau of Gender Equality, ILO suggested that there are pros and cons to labour reforms. All social partners affected by the changing laws have to be involved. India has ratified ILO’s Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration and wage fixing way back in 1958. It is evident that its implementation has been far from universal. At least a sector specific minimum wage for men and women should be guaranteed, if not a nationwide wage. This would have a positive impact on the poorest of the poor. **Ms. Amarjeet Kaur, AITUC** emphasized that the trend of the state withdrawing from its social responsibilities in the informal sector needs to be reversed. Legislations are in place, but their implementation leaves a lot to be desired. Even in industries with official welfare boards, beedi workers for example, 60% of the workers do not have identity cards. Unionization is prohibited in SEZ (Special Economic

Zone) and EPZ (Export Processing Zone) areas. No minimum wages are paid. **Mr. S. Patil, Employers' Federation of India** felt that agriculture needed to be taken up as an entrepreneurial activity. **Dr. G. Raveendran, Consultant** said there was no doubt that wages paid to men and women are discriminatory. The implementation of social security measures too discriminate on the basis of gender. For example, ration cards carrying pre-marital residential details are considered invalid on marriage. Public distribution system rules disallow women from accessing services. There is also a lack of women friendly redressal mechanisms. **Ms. A Venkateshwaran; Under Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry** added that women have to constantly shift from 'own account work' to 'casual' work, in responses to crises, making calculation of productivity and contribution even more difficult.

Dr. Mahendra Dev, Chairman; Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, Ministry of Agriculture in concluding pointed out that there are good systems of education and health in Latin America, and a policy of conditional cash transfers which works there might not work in India.

Session 3: Rethinking strategies for youth employment particularly in the rural context

Ms Jayati Chandra, Secretary, Youth Affairs, Govt of India moderated the panel discussion, initiating it by pointing out that while the 'demographic dividend' of a young population is seen as an asset, this will only be true if we are able to find ways of harnessing the energies of youth. If instead we are faced with unemployment and eroding opportunities the same situation becomes tense and uncertain. There is an employment challenge; there is equally a social and safety challenge facing India today.

Mr Anil Bordia, Chair, Federation for Education and Development (FED) referred to the work of FED which has been working with adolescents over the last ten years. The Doosra Dashak project in Rajasthan started in 2001 and seeks to address issues of citizenship, livelihood and human rights through life skills education and residential education. The project reaches out to youth in 9 blocks of the state, covering 10,000 villages and the target group consists of tribals, SC communities and Muslims which together make up a third of the population of the state. Experience shows that all programmes for training farmers have gone awry. In this situation, the interventions of civil society groups like Doosra Dashak become increasingly significant. With the tribal community, most workers are illiterate, hence education and literacy has been a central focus for the project. The basic aim is to train youth as activists, to seek better delivery of programmes and find sustainable local solutions. In our experience, self help groups tend to conflict with women's organizations. The values of the latter are to put the community before self while SHGs tend to put the self upfront and seek to encourage individualistic effort for change. There is need for detailed and micro level research to get a correct assessment of the situation of youth in rural areas, especially those from marginalized communities, and the actual

economic opportunities open to them. Only against such information can meaningful skill development training be given.

Dr Mridul Eapen, Member, State Planning Board, Kerala said that Kerala is a state with a high HDI but low work force participation of women. Evidence suggests low levels of social empowerment of women, reflected in high levels of violence, dowry, erosion of property rights, mental ill health. Against this background the new Kerala Planning Board, constituted in 2006, has tried to develop a framework for holistic action. Women are largely concentrated in traditional work, including cashews, coir and tobacco. There is a two-fold policy concern: one, how can we bring down levels of violence against women, and second, how can we increase women's economic capability. Schemes that have been formulated include a Gender Awareness Programme and Finishing School. The idea of the 'finishing school' is to add a 'finishing touch' to standard training programmes which do not always enhance employability. For example the Bamboo Mission has developed a new machine which has doubled the productivity of women workers. Similarly with handlooms, the effort is to improve products and productivity, in this case with help from the NID. Personality Development is another aspect of these trainings. There is need for a supporting budget allocation, and a re-orienting of existing allocations so as to address areas of women's work. The provision of crèches, toilets at the work place is an example of expenditure to support women's work. A programme has been started for the psycho-social development of adolescents, including counseling for behavior, sex education. A Health Club has been set up in schools, and gender education of teachers started. If we are to address gender inequalities in society, it is necessary to work with younger people and not just adults.

Ms Aheli Chowdhury, JOSH shared the experiences of the partners and contacts in Rajasthan and other parts of the country that JOSH has, with regard to NREGA, and that this has given young people a lot of hope. We feel that that there are very few forums that involve youth, and usually they are expected to be passive recipients rather than active participants in processes that will take decisions about their lives. There is need to include youth in forums that help them to understand what citizenship means. We are involved in advocating for the wider use of RTI. In questioning the system, RTI brings in a very new attitude for a culture that doesn't encourage questioning. We need to remember that youth is not just our future: it is also our present.

Participants contributed to the topic under discussion. **Ms Amarjeet Kaur, AITUC** said that the Kerala interventions are interesting but we need to keep in mind that there are school age children who may or may not be in school; and only 15 % of youth are in universities; cannot confine outreach to schools and universities. We have seen that in the SEZs, EPZs, most workers are young unmarried women, working in order to save up for their dowry. In fact it is often hard for young women who are married to get work in these places, so they hide the fact of their marriage. **Ms Vijayalakshmi, AITUC** added another concern, that acid attacks against young women in Andhra Pradesh have been on the increase. **Ms Sunita Kapila, Consultant**

UN HABITAT asked what the role of the private sector in relation to youth, and ensuring employability, could be. **Ms Nirmala Banerjee** commented that one of the factors that limits the employability and mobility of youth is limited language skills (for example knowing just Bengali without functional English makes mobility difficult). We need better information systems to know who and where are the potential employers, what inputs do youth need to access work. Other participants pointed out that when growth is high, industry starts its own training programmes – as can be seen with hotels, retail, fashion designing. It would be useful to document such programmes/ pilot ventures. **Dr Preet Rustagi** suggested that it would be useful to explore the use of audio visual media for training and to measure the resources available for gender training. For example, a useful study could be made of Mahila Samakhya Kerala.

Ms Jayati Chandra brought the discussion to a close by emphasizing that as a young nation, we have to view youth employment both from the perspective of the family and its sustenance and as individual actualization. Specific areas that need attention include a system for forecasting employment on a regular basis; innovating so as to increase productivity; allowing space for experimentation, taking risks and failure; ethics as an area of concern.

Session 4: Measuring Women's Unpaid Work

The session was chaired by **Dr Abhijit Sen, Member Planning Commission.**

Dr G Raveendran, Consultant, made a presentation on the measurement of women's contribution to the GDP. The NCEUS report (2007) defines the unorganized/informal sector as comprised of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services, operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers. The report further defines unorganized/informal workers as those working in unorganized enterprises or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment/ social security benefits provided by the employers. Dr Raveendran employed the NCEUS definition to estimate women's contribution to the GDP in formal and informal sectors and in different industry groups. The methodology involved apportioning of GDP estimates of different compilation categories between informal and formal sectors by using the estimates of labour inputs and productivity differentials of the respective categories and then between male and female workers by using their proportions in labour in each category.

A statistical overview of women's work in India was presented. Women constituted 32.2 percent of the total work force in 2004-05 and among them 72.8 percent were employed in agriculture as against 48.8 percent of men. Women workers in non-agriculture constituted only 27.2 percent and 11.5 percent among them were in manufacturing. The other industry groups which employed more than a million women were trade, education, private households, construction, other

community, social & personal services, hotels & restaurants and public administration and defence. Within the manufacturing sector there were only seven industry groups where women's presence was significant (defined as more than 0.7 million workers as this was the median value for magnitude of female workers among different manufacturing industries at the national level). Among these manufacturing industries, there were four industry groups in which the share of women workers exceeded the overall average of 32 percent. These were spinning, weaving & finishing of textiles, tobacco products, wearing apparel and chemicals & chemical products. Women workers were predominantly in the informal sector with a share of about 91.2 percent.

The overall rate of growth of women workers between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 was higher than that of males at 3.74% as against a growth rate of 2.26 percent for men. Though the growth rate of female workers was significantly high in some of the modern industries like computer related activities, telecommunication, research & development, etc the absolute level of employment of women in these sectors was very low. The growth rates are over the year 1999-2000, though it was not considered as a good bench mark. Women contributed 23.4 percent of the GDP in the informal sector and 16.2 percent in the formal sector during 2004-05. The overall contribution of women to the GDP was about 19.8 percent.. The contribution of women to GDP is underestimated due to exclusion of processing of primary products for own consumption from the definition of economic activity and self-reporting of worker status by the informants during surveys. Women are doubly disadvantaged by virtue of being engaged in traditional industries where productivity is low and informality is high.

Dr Lekha Chakraborty, NIPFP made a presentation arguing for the value of time use surveys in measurement of women's work. Non-market time is not captured and cannot therefore influence the formulation of macro economic policy, but non market time is the combination of leisure and unpaid work. These two components need to be bifurcated as they have different implications for and responses to macro economic policy. Time use data can capture market time, leisure, and unpaid work as distinct categories. Time use data reveals that women work for more hours in unpaid care activities than men. Women carry disproportionately share of workload than men. Women have dual burden due to such care roles and this is not recognized in policy making. Time poverty is crucial to look into stresses on women. She highlighted the 1999 time use macro study in 6 states and argued for the need to revive time use surveys and generate time series data through periodic time use surveys on women's work. The United Nations has accepted extended SNA activities into its conceptualization of work. While SNA activities are included in GDP, extended SNA are not. She also discussed valuation issues between the input method or output method. The Input method uses wage to value work while the output method uses prices. She felt that the input method was better as it captured intensity of work. Ms. Chakraborty concluded by stating that improved capture of time use data can also allow policy makers to compute the benefit incidence of public investment and disaggregate by gender.

Dr Anushree Sinha, NCAER presented an analysis locating women in the macro-economy. She agreed that gendered macroeconomic data could be used for planning and policy analysis. Building a gendered social accounting matrix and using minimum wages to calculate contribution, productivity and output is one method of doing this. 98% of workers in non-market work are women. Calculations suggest that the share of non market work (imputed value) for women is as much as 49.56 of the total. The care work of women goes into savings of the government as social sector expenditure can be less. Assuming an increase in demand leading to increase in demand for female labour, women's choices should be made against knowledge of the cost and benefit of time spent on care work vs market work. Such calculations require measurement and valuation of time spent on care work, allowing a better calculation of income and productivity.

These presentations were followed by comments and questions from the floor.

Ms Nirmala Banerjee raised the question that while tables for unpaid work and women's contribution to GDP are based on principal activity status, how do we handle the fact that women are engaged in multiple activities? **Dr Mridul Eapen** suggested that Dr Raveendran has provided a way to capture the economic contribution of women who are generally not regarded as workers in official statistical system and fully agreed that the unpaid work of women engaged in non-market work needs also to be evaluated. **Ms Jane Hodges** discussed the recommendations of the ILO Gender Equality Committee which has recently focused on building statistical capacity in nations to track women and informality in the labour market. **Dr Preet Rustagi** felt there may be problems in linking time use to NIC and NCO categories due to the variability of time use data. Different persons have different time patterns and ways of doing things. How can time patterns and data be synchronized better? **Dr Saraswati Raju** discussed the possibility of using data to ascertain drudgery indices, and the need to disaggregate geographically. **Dr Anushree Sinha** responded that the valuation of women's non market work can allow for empowering choices in terms of women being able to evaluate their work-life choices. **Dr Lekha Chakraborty** agreed that we need to look into codes and the structure of categories used to classify survey and time use data, and re-iterated that time use can capture quality of time and work and make a significant difference if used for macro-policy making. **Dr Raveendran** explained that for the purpose of quantifying the level of underestimation, those women who stated 92 and 93 as their principal status but 11 to 51 as their subsidiary status and thus were included in the workforce have been excluded. On an average, women who were not in the labour force and reported 92 and 93 as their principal status were engaged in 2.53 listed activities. There are two categories of persons performing unpaid work. The first category of unpaid workers are those already included in the workforce and there were 108 million persons in that category during 2004-05. Since they are already in the work force their contribution to

the economy is included in the national accounts. The second category is those not included in the workforce. Their contribution to the economy is not included in the GDP.

Session 5: Strengths and Challenges Confronting SHGs and their Future Direction

Ms Amarjeet Kaur, AITUC chaired the panel on self help groups.

Dr. K. Kalpana, Centre for Development Finance (CDF) at the Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR) in her presentation remarked that today SHGs have become a bone of contention between the two major Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu – the AIADMK and the DMK, with both claiming to be the originators of the program in the state. The state government sponsored SHG program, the rural development administration, various government departments and NGOs are in a scramble to form more and more self help groups and extend loans. The SwarnJayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), flagged off in 1999-2000, is a poverty alleviation programme aimed at financing enterprises. The credit injected is channeled through the institution of the SHG which is expected to use the loan to finance a collectively-managed economic activity. Fieldwork revealed that women themselves have rejected the posited link between credit access and enterprise promotion, which is the premise of the SGSY scheme. Firstly, heterogeneity in the composition of households, and consequently differences in levels of education, current employment status and landowning patterns, prevent all members of a SHG from interacting with the market in a similar fashion. Secondly, the actual selection of entrepreneurial activity under the SGSY is fraught with uncertainty and a complete absence of planning with regard to local demand patterns. Lastly, women were unwilling to take up the risk that is inevitably associated with entrepreneurship. Yet, SHG women were tempted to access the SGSY loans owing to the subsidy component, while banks and the BDO were mandated to ensure distribution of a given ‘quota’ of loans since the SGSY is a targeted, anti-poverty scheme. In this scenario, SHG exercised considerable ingenuity in making the scheme work for them by subverting its official purpose. SHG women divided the SGSY loan equally among all group members, used the money for diverse household-related needs and made timely repayment to the bank. The banks, the BDO and the NGOs were fully aware of the unofficial diversion of SGSY loans and even aided women in different ways in their routinized subversion of official purpose of the scheme.

This study found that whatever enterprise existed in study villages was household-based (not collectively-managed by the group) and in the more successful cases existed even before the SHG was formed. Women co-managed small, home-based stores, hotels, owned brick kilns jointly with their husbands or operated retail businesses (sarees). Shortage of credit was not always the key constraint on business activities managed by SHG member households. It was usually a shortage of family labour, given the perceived unreliability of hired labour.

Unsurprisingly, all households were not equally able to use SHG loans for enterprise activities. Families drew upon a reserve of older experience (prior to SHG membership) and the ability to use social networks (of influence and former clients) in starting a new business. Asset ownership was important to starting a new business and surviving business crisis. Existing socio-economic hierarchies were reflected in the nature of SHG members' business activities. Women from landless households and from socially marginalized (SC) communities were predominantly engaged in daily wage labour in agriculture and the urban informal economy and in particular in *beedi*-rolling (in one of the study villages). The livelihoods of SHG members from OBC communities were relatively more diversified. Single women rarely managed successful businesses and if they did so, they tended to operate secondary businesses that supplemented primary income sources earned by other family members. This study suggests the futility of schemes that impose the conditionality of enterprise-management by women, whether offered by NGOs or the state. Women valued the ability to exercise full control over end-use of loans – whether borrowed from the group or from banks. This study further suggests that women will use their agency to subvert schemes that do not meet their requirements or match their life-circumstances. The more rigidly-designed the scheme, the more ingenious is likely to be their subversion. During block-level SHG coordinator meetings, women raised issues of exploitation and bad working conditions in small shoe companies in which a large number of SHG members, in the study villages, were employed. The concerns they raised suggest that the link between SHGs and livelihoods should not be defined exclusively in terms of self-employment or enterprise-based activities. They force us to think out of the box and ask whether the social dynamics and collective energies associated with SHGs can be harnessed towards the end of ensuring 'decent work' in the sphere of wage employment as well.

Ms. Soma Parthasarathy, Consultant offered reflections based on another study of SHGs. SHGs (Self Help Groups) are entities built to enhance women's access to credit and productive resources. Conceptually and empirically, SHGs are not homogeneous groups because they cannot be allowed to reinforce traditional hierarchies of class and caste, but rather, push for change and empowerment. There are several anomalies between the espoused goals of SHGs and practice. Mechanisms for financial inclusion are in effect, discriminatory. Women are consistently charged higher rates of interest, there is little effort to address social security measures and the criteria and mechanisms for membership and access to resources remain exclusionary. The demand for collateral is implicit and the burden of loan repayment is placed squarely on women. These financial regulations in fine print lead us to question the potential of SHGs for engendering development and alleviating poverty. Micro credit appears to increase women's existing burden of poverty redressal. By accepting credit on family terms, incidences of violence have increased. Assets are frequently not in women's names. Opportunities for training and capacity building are limited to the credit management function. In NIRANTAR's national level study, only 60 % of the 2700 surveyed SHGs were provided any training; 4% were

provided with any training on livelihoods activities; 11% of the groups had any explicit focus on issues of violence, out of which only 1% reported any collective action to support women in situations of crisis and 16% had engaged with issues of governance. Livelihoods concerns can be better addressed and ameliorated through the SHG by converging micro credit entitlements with other policies. National and micro policies on the FRA, industry, mining and climate change and livelihoods sustainability require cross cutting systems of governance (community and macro level) and linkages. The rights based agenda of SHGs needs to be further developed.

Women's roles and hierarchies within the group are based on class and caste dynamics. It is not unusual for the leadership to take significant portion of credit benefits. Single women are marginalized and poor women's savings become leverage for others to receive credit. Conversely, women are also forced to take consecutive loans to pay off pending loans, so that micro credit becomes not a strategy for poverty alleviation, but mitigation, a 'basket of credit' cycle with no long term impact. Only 11% of the nationally surveyed groups have had exposure to governance and decentralized planning. Women coming into the electoral process through panchayati raj institutions have gained in articulation but continue to replicate gender stereotypes. SHGs can enable and assist this process of transformation. By constructing SHG groups as "client" entities, women are rendered invisible as mere instruments for credit use. The proposed micro finance bill is not sensitive to women's needs and proposes to use their labour for credit extension.

Ms. Sneh Lata Kumar; Executive Director, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh described the work of the RMK. The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh is an autonomous organization of the Ministry of Women & Child Development. It is the only national-level micro-finance organization, in the government sector exclusively for poor women. Self sustaining, and with no establishment grants, RMK is a single- window organization. The objectives of the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh are to provide credit as an instrument of socio-economic change and strive for gender empowerment via income generation activities. As a single window organization, it is responsible for financing micro-loans, capacity building of NGO intermediaries and women, providing training on the technicalities of micro-finance, project formulation, SHGs promotion, risk management, awareness generation, skill development and strengthening market linkages. At the grassroots level, RMK has developed an innovative scheme of working capital term loans to expand its grass root client base by covering women (individual and groups) micro-entrepreneurs. 53% of the RMK's present loans have been extended towards dairy farming, goat, sheep and pig rearing and fishery.

Self help groups are the engines of microfinance. Members usually come from homogeneous socio-economic backgrounds and work for mutual benefit and trust. Peer pressure is the only collateral. While its strengths emerge from the collective pooling of resources, thrift mobilization and credit dispensation, the democratic manner of functioning, achieving social recognition and

deriving security in numbers, the lack of education and low level of skills are the principal challenges faced by SHGs today. SHGs are platforms for achieving gender equality and empowerment, and consequently, the focal point of government programmes. In the future, greater policy attention needs to be paid to the education and skills of members partaking of loans. Micro-credit should encourage micro-entrepreneurs through skill development interventions and enable them to achieve economic independence. Secondly, those SHGs based on a just social ethos are more vibrant and responsive. There is a greater participation of women in decision-making and governance. Hence the mechanism of a collective entity should be institutionalized by all stakeholders in policy frameworks and implementation.

These presentations were followed by comments and suggestions from the floor. **Mr. Anil Bordia, Doosra Dashak** said that in the course of our work at the grassroots, we find a conflict between older *mahila sanghams* and newly formed SHGs. Their different objectives come to the fore. While the former struggle for rights and livelihoods of women with a broader vision, SHGs tend to be focused on a narrow concern. SEWA experience has apparently been different with no conflict observed between belonging to SHGs and trade union unity. **Dr. A Sinha, NCAER** mentioned that NCAER conducted a study on SHGs in 2006-07 across nine states in the country. A broad spectrum of SHGs – homogenous and mixed (on the basis of class, caste and gender and levels of education) – were surveyed. It was found that SHGs homogeneous in their membership possessed more discipline and were more successful in their ventures. Other participants raised varying concerns. It was pointed out that currently the skills’ training provided by the state is not at all in keeping with market demands. SHGs are often given the responsibility for keeping the municipality clean as well as cooking mid day meals, for meager wages. While homogeneous groups can work well together, such groups can also become nodes of parochialism in the locality. Solely minority or SC women’s groups can lead to unrest. Issues of violence need to be better addressed by women through the channel of SHGs. Subsidies meant for SHGs are never disbursed directly to groups. The much vaunted 25% interest is paid only after the loan is completely repaid and the account closed. Difference between microfinance and SHGs should also be kept in mind, in that the latter is tightly controlled and severe penalties imposed in case of delays. **Ms. Jane Hodges, Director; Bureau of Gender Equality, ILO** said that ILO’s Convention No. 141 on rural workers’ organization was ratified by India in 1977. Microfinance and SHGs can be a positive platform for trade unions to better articulate their demands. **Dr. Rohini Somanathan, Professor; Delhi School of Economics** felt that SHGs have a pre-determined structure and cannot be expected to do many things at the same time. Organizing a successful enterprise, becoming a community forum for addressing social issues and rejuvenating local female leadership is difficult to manage simultaneously. Moreover homogeneity is not always a criterion of success. In a study conducted in Jharkhand, it was found that groups headed by women who possessed a rudimentary grasp of reading, writing and numeracy skills, performed significantly better than those groups all of whose members were illiterate. **Dr. Preet Rustagi, Senior Fellow, IHD** asked what the actual proportion of women

who were subverting the SGSY scheme in Tamilnadu to their benefit was, and were there any positive aspects? This example also leads one to think whether wage/self employment schemes should be replaced by direct/conditional cash transfers as the way forward. **Radhika, UNDP** suggested that most poor women cannot risk enterprise, so employment should remain the state's primary development strategy. Also, SHGs are primarily channels of credit. We should refrain from burdening the SHG with more and more responsibilities of community empowerment, because women are already far too busy with domestic chores and agricultural work. SHGs are a limited model of development in so far as they provide opportunities to women for self propelling themselves into a higher income level. From the RMK perspective, it was explained that homogeneity, especially socio-economic homogeneity, is a relative concept and not absolute. Women can be similar to each other in one respect (caste, locational proximity, combating militarism in Kashmir) but diverse in others. Homogeneity across one axis is a requirement for the formation of SHGs because they are basically affinity groups. **Ms. Sneh Lata Kumar, Executive Director, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh** added that RMK is trying to offer alternatives to the high rates of interest and strict recovery mechanisms offered by national financial institutions. **Ms. K. Kalpana, IFMR** said in response that the SGSY loans did not lead to 'enterprise' in the manner the state envisaged it, but rather assisted in making life-enhancing improvements such as investments in land, a medical operation and so on. Men are definitely interested in forming SHGs and feel that the state has constructed them wrongly as un-thrifty (as opposed to women who are thrifty and worth investing in). **Ms. S. Parthasarathy, Consultant** responded that the established norm of women as 'reliable repayers' can become a hindrance as men's SHGs (in Gujarat for example, and with far lower rates of success) free ride on women groups' successes. Today's SHGs do not have an empowerment agenda. The tradition of local mahila sanghas taking up literacy or anti-alcoholism drives is no more. Rather, it has been subsumed by the SHG revolution of credit disbursement. The Kudumbashree in Kerala now gives piece rate work to women. The transformatory and capacity building potential of the SHG is not nurtured. The SHG can become a successful vehicle for engendering change and embedding a rights based agenda in women's consciousness. The enterprise/livelihoods debate misses the crux of the matter. Most SHG members in rural India are by and large owners of small plots of land. Instead of being offered a single activity as 'enterprise' for increasing their coffers, they need help in negotiating the external market and attaining diversification in the face of an increasingly unreliable agricultural season.

Session 6: Policy Recommendations and Way Forward

Ms. Reiko Tsushima, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO opened the concluding session by flagging the key issues that have surfaced in the last two days' Consultation –

- There is a significant gender dimension to employment growth in recent years. The number of working women has greatly increased.
- The female labour force is becoming more concentrated in informal work.
- While greater education should bring better opportunities, women are getting clustered in low paying, low skill areas of work.
- Economic reform cannot take place in exclusion of social and cultural norms.
- Sector specific challenges, be it in manufacturing, textiles or agriculture, have to be understood and addressed.
- The ‘missing middle’ – women are finding it difficult to move out of agriculture following male migration into urban areas.
- SHGs

Ms. Ratna Sudarshan; Director, ISST summarized the suggestions made for further research in the course of the consultation:

- What determines women’s work force participation? Research that encompasses the economic and cultural factors that influence WPR is required.
- The impact of secondary plus education of women on various outcomes such as work participation, fertility rates and IMR.
- A case study of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 to understand what are the definitional or other factors leading to very few cases being filed under this Act
- Beyond regional and state level differences, there is need for micro-level studies. One example is the need to map current profile and actual economic opportunities open to youth in a given area, in order to make appropriate skill training interventions. Similarly, a mapping of on-going enterprises in an area before offering financial or other support would help to ensure that policy builds on and does not negate livelihood opportunities that already exist.
- Documentation of private sector initiatives towards employment oriented training
- Evidence for and against cash transfers in the Indian context
- System for employment forecasting
- Conduct research for bringing innovation in products and productivity
- Streamlining current glossary to allow for global comparisons
- Regular time use surveys to generate a parallel set of data to the NSS, allowing a link to be made between non SNA activities and macro level policy making, and the significance of factors such as time spent on travel in work decisions and outcomes.
- Better capture of women’s work by the NSS.

Ms. Nirmala Banerjee; Project Director, SACHETANA drew attention to some significant areas/ issues

- There is an urgent need for a pan India study on SHGs – their present work, duties and responsibilities – and how they figure in the larger women’s movement.
- Better ways of counting work have to be devised.
- The government needs to provide night shelters to working women
- Regional diversity has to be taken into account while formulating policy.
- The state’s record as an employer is also chequered. The piece rate wages paid to anganwadi workers denies her the ‘worker’ status and blatantly exploited.

Ms. Amarjeet Kaur AITUC said that the Migrant Workers’ Act, 1979 is obsolete. It is addressed only to inter-state movements and does not take the needs of intra-state migrants into account. Women workers are unsafe and need more foolproof legislation. Secondly, ILO’s convention on home based workers (177) has still not been ratified by the government of India.

Ms. Soma Parthasarathy, Consultant pointed out that there is also an urgent need to commission more research on sectoral studies, and develop ways of using the ILO conventions to improve conditions. The Microfinance Sector Bill (Development and Regulation), 2007 scheduled to be tabled in the monsoon session of the parliament, will severely disempower women. Instead of putting poor women at its heart, the Bill talks of ‘clients’. It seeks to ‘collect’ their thrift instead of leaving it with them for development.

Ms. Radhika, UNDP: Skills’ training should be carefully designed and women’s employability taken into account. Candle making and paper bag making are redundant skills if there are no markets for these products.

Ms. Anushree Sinha, NCAER: Completing a thorough valuation exercise for non-market work is crucial.

Mr. G. Ravindran, Consultant: Mr. G. Raveendran, Consultant: Employment forecasting would be an useful mechanism for identifying gaps between demand and supply

Ms. R. Tsushima, Senior Gender Specialist, ILO: The ILO will focus on the following in order to carry forward the agenda of gender equality –

- Support the skill development initiatives of MoLE in 4 unorganized sectors and conduct a skill map of each sector.
- Develop nationally certified (so that they are transferable from one state to another) training modules for domestic workers.
- Existing infrastructure will directly affect the types of work available, and vice versa. Building assets is a large part of the attempt to institute decent work standards in women’s work.

The consultation ended with a vote of thanks given by Ms Ratna Sudarshan.