Introduction

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Much has been written about the impact of globalization on the world's poor and especially on low-income women producers and workers. It is generally accepted that the impact can be both negative and positive and differs by country, industry or trade and employment status. Some women find new jobs or new markets for their products, while others have lost jobs or markets. In addition, many have seen their wages decline, their working conditions deteriorate or their workloads increase.[1]

While recognizing that negative effects do occur, the focus of this book is to show that globalization, and especially trade liberalization, open up new economic opportunities and that low-income women can take advantage of these if enabled to do so. The six case studies commissioned on this theme have been written by teams of international and national experts from various Commonwealth countries. In recognition of the fact that conditions and needs of women in different types of employment vary considerably, the studies cover a range of employment types including smallholders in traditional export commodities, wage workers in non-traditional export crops and wage workers in labour-intensive export industries.

The women upon whom the case studies are based are representative of those who make up the majority of the world's 550 million working poor (ILO, 2004). If the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the number of those living in poverty by the year 2015 is to be met, then women like these must be enabled to adequately contribute to and benefit from export-led growth. Trade liberalization will not automatically result in a reduction in poverty. This book hopes to contribute to our understanding of how this linkage can be strengthened by giving a detailed account and analysis of a range of strategies that have been developed and implemented in order to make sure that liberalization benefits those who are most in need.

Purpose of the Book

The research undertaken in the preparation of the case studies had four major purposes. First, it aimed to provide activists and researchers in Commonwealth countries with the opportunity of examining their experiences of working with women within the context of trade liberalization. Thus, the case studies have been written by people who have been very closely involved in the initiatives described.

Second, it aimed to contribute to the current debate about women and trade policy in developing countries with a focus on the informal economy.

Third, given the complexity of the strategies needed to overcome the constraints which women face in benefiting from trade liberalization, it aimed to provide information that would be useful to a range or actors and institutions in developing successful strategies. The institutions involved include international agencies, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, including companies, cooperatives, membership associations and trade unions.

And finally, given the important role that trade and other government policies play in the way in which benefits from trade and market liberalization are distributed among different segments of the population, the research was intended to be of use to governments. It aimed to provide government policy-makers in Commonwealth countries with concrete examples of how policies and programmes which accompany trade and market liberalization can enable and have enabled a shift of access, power and returns in favour of low-income women producers and workers within global value chains.

Research Questions

The overall research question posed in the book is: to what extent can women producers and workers in developing countries benefit from new economic opportunities arising from trade and market liberalization?

More specifically, the book looks at:

- the nature and content of the strategies which have successfully linked women producers with global markets or created jobs for women in export markets;
- the role of government and other actors in successful strategies;
- the replicability and sustainability of achievements.

Selection of Case Studies

All the case studies in the book include the common premise that low-income women producers and workers can benefit from trade liberalization if they are enabled to do so. However, they were also selected to provide a range of contexts, strategies and experiences which can add to our understanding of the complex issue of spreading the gains of trade and market liberalization to poorer sections of the population. Therefore, they include:

- different regions of the Commonwealth and economies of different sizes;
- different types of local producers/workers, including independent producers, employees in small-scale factories, and wage workers in large farms, factories and companies supplying export markets through global value chains; existing members of the workforce are involved as well as new entrants;
- different economic sectors, including unprocessed and processed traditional commodities, non-traditional agricultural commodities, labour-intensive manufactured goods and labour-intensive services;
- different strategies/approaches to maximizing trade-related employment opportunities, including alternative trade, traditional business development services, social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility/labour legislation, female-led industrialization and technology-driven globalization;
- different types of actors (international agencies, governments, international and national NGOs, and the private sector) involved in different combinations in assisting local women producers and workers to take advantage of new economic opportunities arising from trade and market liberalization.

Summary of the Case Studies

Of the six case studies included in the book, three are from Africa (Ghana, Mozambique and South Africa), two are from South Asia (Bangladesh and India) and one is from the Pacific (Samoa). Several of the case studies also involve developed countries within the Commonwealth, including the UK, Australia and New Zealand, which are linked to producers and workers in the South through various marketing arrangements and commodity or production chains. The size of the economies involved varies from very tiny (Samoa) to very large (India).

In terms of work involved, three of the case studies focus on independent producers/smallholders (Ghana, Samoa and Mozambique), one involves employees of small factories (Mozambique) and three involve wage workers in large enterprises (South Africa, Bangladesh and India). Those involved in Ghana, Samoa, Mozambique and South Africa are existing members of the workforce, while the women in Bangladesh and India tend to be new entrants. All the women in the case studies are either self-employed or wage workers without contracts and are thus part of the informal economy. The only exception is the India case study, where the women do have contracts, but are working under conditions which bear many of the characteristics of the informal economy.

Three of the case studies involve traditional commodities (cocoa in Ghana, coconuts in Samoa and cashew nuts in Mozambique), although in all cases strategies have included moving into value-added processed commodities (chocolate, organic virgin coconut oil and processed cashews). One study involves non-traditional agricultural exports (deciduous fruits in South Africa). The Bangladesh case study looks at labour-intensive manufactured goods (ready-made garments) and the India case study looks at labour-intensive services (call centres). The relationship between trade policies and these various economic sectors is explored in a separate chapter.

In terms of strategies, there are examples of fair trade (Ghana); traditional business development services/niche market (Samoa); small enterprise development/social entrepreneurship (Mozambique); ethical trade/labour legislation (South Africa); female-led industrialization (Bangladesh); and technology-driven globalization (India). These strategies are all set within the context of global value chains and the way in which analysis of these chains has informed their development.

Finally, while most of the case studies involve a range of actors, there are usually one or two dominant players. These include: fair trade organizations/international NGOs (Ghana); a national women's NGO (Samoa); social entrepreneur/government (Mozambique); Northern supermarkets/government (South Africa); international agencies/private sector (Bangladesh); and multinational companies/national companies (India).

Obviously, not all countries and not all the different types of employment undertaken by low-income women could be included. One important category which is not covered is that of homeworkers or industrial outworkers who work from their homes under informal arrangements within global value chains. This category, which is fast growing as employers try to reduce costs by contracting out work, has, however, been covered in other recent publications (Lund and Nicolson, 2003; Oxfam, 2004). In addition, while the case studies are very detailed, not all issues of importance to low-income women could be covered within them. One important subject that is not covered is that of the extension of social protection to low-income women who work informally. Again, this has been covered in another volume of case studies (Lund and Nicolson, 2003).

Some of the main characteristics of each case study are presented in the brief summaries below as a guide to the main section of the book.

Kuapa Kokoo Cooperative, Ghana

The Kuapa Kokoo cocoa cooperative in Ghana buys cocoa from its members for onward export and sale through the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Company (CMC). It has a membership of 45,000 farmers in 890 villages, of whom 70 per cent are smallholders and 30 per cent are women. The cooperative was established in 1993, with the assistance of Twin Trading, UK and the Netherlands development organisation, SNV, in response to the liberalization of the cocoa sector, and has grown very rapidly from its original membership base of 2,000 farmers. The output of the cooperative represents about 8 per cent of total world sales of cocoa. Of this, about 3 per cent is separated and tagged for the fair trade market which guarantees a 'floor' price per tonne and a 'premium' of US$150 per tonne for investment in community projects which meet women's priority needs in their everyday lives. In addition, Kuapa Kokoo members own the Day Chocolate Company in the UK which moves producers up the global value chain from production to retailing. The case study shows how smallholders were helped to seize the opportunities which arose following the abolition of the Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod) and were thus able to take control of their own livelihoods.

Virgin Coconut Oil Cooperatives, Samoa

The second case study is from Samoa, where a local NGO, Women in Business Development Incorporated (WIBDI), has introduced an improved production technology to 13 cooperatives to enable them to produce organic virgin coconut oil for export markets – primarily Australia and New Zealand. Each cooperative has about 50 members, all of whom belong to the same extended family. Women manage all but three of the cooperatives and women's status has increased as they are seen as having brought income opportunities to their communities. The project was started by WIBDI in 1996 as part of its micro-finance and micro-enterprise scheme, and has enabled women and their families to improve their incomes as well as reviving coconut production and contributing to export earnings. Exports have increased significantly since organic certification was obtained. The study shows how a local NGO can assist women to enter export markets through provision of traditional business services including credit, training, improved technologies, and marketing research and assistance.

Cashew Nut Producers and Processors, Mozambique

The third case study focuses on women smallholders and factory workers involved in efforts to regenerate the cashew nut production, processing and export industry in Mozambique. Following the collapse of the large state-owned processing factories in the 1990s, several smaller-scale factories have been established by the private sector with government support. A particularly interesting experiment is the setting up of 'satellite' processing units around one of these factories. This is seen as a way of adding more value locally, shortening the supply chain by eliminating middlemen and providing more employment for rural people, including women. This innovative model revolves around a social entrepreneur in partnership with government and an international NGO, Technoserve.

Deciduous Fruit Workers, South Africa

The fourth study looks at the introduction of national labour legislation and private sector codes of conduct and their impact on women working in the fruit industry in South Africa. At the end of apartheid in 1994, there were an estimated 102,000 permanent workers on South African fruit farms (of whom 26 per cent were women) and 181,000 temporary workers (of whom 69 per cent were women). While these numbers have increased, there has also been a restructuring of the workforce and of employment relations as a result of liberalization, which disbanded the government-regulated marketing channel for fruit exports and opened fruit growers up to the direct forces of global competition and international quality and labour standards. Enactment of national legislation, backed by international codes of conduct imposed by UK supermarkets, means that women's labour rights are being addressed for the first time and that they are now entitled to contracts in their own right. However, the combination of government legislation and increased global competition has prompted many growers to shed on-farm labour – mainly women – who then work as casual labourers without access to a contract. Thus, although labour protection has shifted in a more equitable direction, further progress is needed if it is to be consolidated for all women workers, including the most vulnerable.

Women Garment Workers, Bangladesh

The fifth case study examines the export industry for ready-made garments (RMG) which has been a major result of liberalization in Bangladesh. The industry currently employs 1.5 million workers, the majority of whom are women, and is a prime example of female-led, export-led industrialization. This was promoted by the introduction of international quotas and export-oriented national policies, which supported the transfer of production and marketing expertise from Korea, and by the drive of local entrepreneurs. Women workers in export industries, and especially in Export Processing

Zones (EPZs), receive more benefits, higher wages and better working conditions than those in domestic industries. Exports have provided much-needed employment for women in the poorer section of the rural population and raised their visible significance as economic contributors to their families. However, there are queries about the long-term sustainability of the industry, partly as a result of the phasing out of the Multifibre Arrangement (MFA) in 2005.

Women Call Centre Workers, India

The last study looks at the relocation of jobs in the information technology-enabled service (ITES) industries, such as call centres, from high wage to low wage countries. India has been a major recipient of such work and is expected to have a US$57 billion annual export industry in information services by 2008 employing four million people, of whom at least 40 per cent will be women. Call centres already employ more than 160,000 people, of whom between 45 and 70 per cent are women. Although these jobs are located in the formal sector, they display many characteristics typical of informal employment. These include lack of security as a result of companies moving to countries with lower wage rates than India, and the cancelling of work contracts as a result of pressure in the North to limit the outsourcing of jobs.

The book concludes with two overviews. One looks at the overall trade policy context within which the case studies are situated, while the other draws out the main lessons learned from them and highlights some of the good ideas for policies and programmes to be considered for future action.

Note

1 For some of the recent literature on trade and gender, see N. Catagay, 2001; M. Fontana *et al.*, 1998; S. Joekes, 1999; M. Williams, 2003; M. Carr and M. Chen, 2002.

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Case Studies


KOKOO
PAPA
PAA
Divine
HEAVENLY MILK CHOCOLATE
WITH A HEART