
Preface

Kate Young

Rapid growth of Third World cities in the 1950s and 1960s led to concern with the problem of unemployment; but anthropological studies (such as that by Hart in Ghana) and investigative missions such as those sponsored by the International Labour Organisation showed that although employment was growing far less rapidly than population, the surplus population, though formally unemployed, was not sitting idle. Rather, this group was undertaking a wide range of economic activities from small-scale manufacture to provision of services which provided an income, albeit frequently minimal. The term 'the Informal Sector' came to designate this area of economic activity. Academics, in taking up the issue, debated the best way to analyse it and particularly its relation to other economic structures. This debate reached its height during the mid 1970s, and although some people have continued to work in this field (eg contributors to the Bromley and Gerry volume) it is to some extent a debate of the past. So why revive it now?

Information accruing on the nature and extent of the Informal Sector indicated its critical importance for a large proportion of the urban population, as well as the difficulties Informal Sector workers faced. Many governments were concerned to develop policies which would remove the grosser discriminations against these workers so as the guarantee them a better income. Most of these policies were slanted towards supporting male Informal Sector workers, heads of households or entrepreneurs. Yet much of the data suggested that women rather than men make up the bulk of those involved in the sector. If this was indeed found to be the case, then it was clear that policies would have to be specifically designed to benefit women rather than men or even families.

So as to get some idea of the magnitude of the problem a small workshop was organised at IDS (Conference 172) in April 1980 to which participants were invited who had some knowledge of the field (a list of participants is given below). The articles in this *Bulletin* are a selection of the papers from this workshop (a list of the original papers can be obtained from the IDS Seminar office). They were chosen partly on the basis of their particular contribution to the debate, and partly because the writers' time commitments permitted revision of the papers. Unfortunately in the end we found we had more material than space, so two articles were omitted, one by Chewya Spindel and another by Raj Bardouille of the Manpower Research Unit at the University of

Zambia, who was unable to attend the workshop but submitted an article on Market Women in a Township in Zambia. Our thanks to both these writers for their contributions and apologies for being unable to include them here.

In this issue there are two papers which deal directly with the Informal Sector debate: in the first, by Bienefeld, the assumptions behind the debate are examined, as are the links between the struggles of those unable to achieve formal employment and of women trying to free themselves from social oppression. In the second, Banerjee questions whether the Informal Sector is an economic category at all, and suggests that it belongs more to the realm of politics. Heyzer, looking at women's participation in the Informal Sector, sketches a possible framework for analysis, while Greenstreet indicates the crucial importance of discrimination in access to education in shaping women's limited economic options. Other articles provide detailed case histories of the form that work for women takes, and either how this is directly organised by capital or how it is patterned according to women's life cycle and the ways in which women can organise despite being involved in fragmented and isolating enterprises. In a final article, the editors of the *Bulletin* look at some of the factors that influence both the form women's work takes and the factors structuring their participation. They point to where future research is urgently needed.

List of Participants in Workshop on Women, the Working Poor, and the Informal Sector. IDS, April 1980

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University of Bradford, UK

Nirmala Banerjee,
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Josephine Beoku-Betts,
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Fourah Bay College, Freetown,
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Manfred Bienefeld,
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Miranda Greenstreet,
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Richard Jolly,
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Michael Lipton,
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Anna Sant'anna,
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