

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRY -
RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE INFORMAL SECTOR

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This morning I have been asked to look at some of the research findings on the informal sector which shed light on the role of women in industry in Zimbabwe. From the start, I would like to acknowledge my own biases - and my limitations. I am a sociologist and not an economist. This may explain why I have chosen to speak to some issues, and perhaps to overlook or underrate others. It may also serve to indicate why I have deliberately chosen to take a rather 'liberal' definition of 'industry' - rather than a technically accurate one. I would like to outline later in this paper why I consider it is imperative to do so. With regard to limitations, I must acknowledge that my 'expertise' is limited to a small scale study carried out in an urban area some four years back. This imposes many limitations, which coupled with the lack of time I had available to me in preparing this paper, I am anxious to acknowledge. That being said - let me outline what I plan to do.

First, I plan to review some of the findings relating to the participation of women in the informal sector in Zimbabwe, indicating some significant differences between men and women, between prevailing assumptions and empirical findings, and between Zimbabwe and other African countries. In the second part of the paper I hope to raise a number of pointers which emerge from the research that has been undertaken, and suggest some directions for the future - in particular, for the forthcoming UNIDO study project.

1.2 One of the effects of the mainstream development strategies that have characterized much of the colonial and post-colonial period in Africa, Asia and Latin America is the restricted economic independence of women, as new methods, new techniques and technologies have challenged and made obsolete their traditional economic roles in society. As Tinker (1976) notes, the modernization version of development has widened the gap between the incomes of men and women, and rather than improving their quality of life, has actually had an adverse effect upon it. The gradual erosion of the role that women traditionally played in subsistence economies began under colonial rule. Discriminatory land policies, educational inequalities and exploitative patterns of urban-centered industrial development that spawned the migratory labour system and the penetration of the capitalist mode of production, all conspired to relegate women to the 'periphery' of the modern economy. Even with the advent of Independence, development planners frequently failed to recognize the dual roles that women were required to perform. As industrialization proceeded, the requirements of those dual roles were often brought into conflict, which in turn has led to increased dependency of women, and inhibited their full integration into the development process.

Official statistics in Third World countries have characteristically ignored the important contribution of women by relegating the vast majority of them to the category 'economically inactive'. A case in point illustrating this official obliteration of women from the labour force, is the 1969 Census of Rhodesia, where a mere 5% of the Black female population was acknowledged as being 'economically active'. Because national statistics tend to omit the 'marginal' economic activities that do not show up in calculations of the GNP, little has been documented about the important contribution women make in the subsistence and informal or 'marginal' sector of the economy, which is often acknowledged to be the 'hidden economy'.

In declaring the 1980s to be the Industrial Development Decade for Africa, both the UN and the African leaders participating in the Lagos Economic Summit, have highlighted the importance of industrial development in promoting self-sustaining national development. The Lagos Plan of Action has underlined the significance of human resources, knowledge, skills and energies in the development process.

Since Africa's greatest asset is its human resources, full mobilization and effective utilization of the labour force (men and women and youth, both trained and untrained) for national development and social progress should be a major instrument of development. (UNECA, 1986)

If Industrial development during the Industrial decade is to achieve the stated aims, it is essential that serious consideration be given to equitable participation and integration of women into the industrialization process. The painful lessons of the Industrial Revolution in the Western world stand as a powerful reminder that economic considerations taken alone are insufficient to ensure social progress based on justice, and a recognition of fundamental human rights and dignity.

1.3 The Informal Sector.

Informal sector operators form part of the so-called 'proto-proletariat' of most Third World countries. They also form an important but often unacknowledged sector of the occupational structure. Women form an important sub-group of this population. While the concept 'informal sector' has been the subject of ongoing debate and contention as to its usefulness, it is not the place here to enter the theoretical debate. Suffice it to say that the term as I use it includes all those 'lower circuit' economic activities that are labour intensive, have little dependence on overhead capital, negligible fixed costs and small inventories of goods and raw materials. In the widely popularized terminology of Schumacher, the level of technology (measured by 'equipment cost per workplace') comes close to being 'one-dollar' - or, perhaps because of inflation - 'ten dollars' as distinguished

from the so-called 'ten-thousand dollar' technology that characterises the factory and modern sector enterprise in general. It is the low level of input costs, ease of entry as well as the mobility of operation that make it an attainable option, often the only one - as a means of livelihood for large numbers of the urban poor and the land-hungry rural poor.

The informal sector concept has been criticized on a number of counts. Three of the most important of these, identified by Sinclair,⁽¹⁹⁷⁸⁾ warrant acknowledgment here because of their applicability to the forthcoming discussion.

- 1) It assumes a homogeneity of units.
- 2) It provides a static rather than a dynamic framework for analysis
- 3) It can serve to obscure the important linkages between formal and informal sectors of the economy.

Reference will be made later to the findings that substantiate Sinclair's reservations.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS: AN OVERVIEW.

2.1 A review of studies on women in the informal sector in Zimbabwe reveals a dearth of systematic empirical material prior to Independence. With the exception of Cheater's study (1979) and Davies' study of Hartley (Chegututu) (1974), most studies of the informal sector have been carried out since Independence. Only one large scale study, currently being undertaken by Horn (1986) has focused specifically on women, and this deals exclusively with fruit and vegetable vendors. Other sources of empirical material on women in the informal sector include the SATEP study (Moyo et al, 1984), the Magaba study (Brand, 1986) a study of Musika squatters conducted by the ^{then} Department of Social Services (Nangati, 1982) a study of the needs of rural youth undertaken by the Ministry of Youth Sport and Culture in collaboration with UNICEF, several papers presented at the Informal Sector Study Workshop in 1983 (Gaidzanwa, 1983 and others) and a study of women's participation in income-generating projects in high density areas of Harare (Kaseke, 1986).

Most of the studies referred to above have stemmed from broader concerns regarding the role of the informal sector as an entity, and its employment creation potential. Reference to factors which define and distinguish women's participation are circumstantial rather than built into the research design. Data are often aggregated rather than broken down by sex, so that only limited use can be made of some the above studies in examining the role of

women in the informal sector.

However, that being said, it seems appropriate to outline some of the pertinent findings gleaned from the above studies.

2.2 Socio-Economic Characteristics of Women in the Informal Sector

First, I would like to sketch a tentative profile of the women in the urban informal sector, as revealed in a study undertaken by the School of Social Work, in^{the} Magaba and Kopje areas of Harare in 1982. Where possible, reference will be made to the findings of other studies for the sake of comparison. Percentages are based on a sample of 85 female members of the informal sector - which represented the total number of women in readily identifiable activities in the areas delimited during the time of the survey. Close to 160 men were interviewed in the same study.

2.2.1 Age: Nearly two thirds of the women interviewed were in the age category 30 - 54 years, representing the major years of later adulthood which are crucial for productive activity. This is roughly comparable with the SATEP study figures, although the age categories specified were slightly different.

2.2.2 Nationality: In striking contrast to the male population interviewed in the Magaba study and the Musika findings, 95% of the female informal sector operators were found to be Zimbabweans. This is largely explained by past migrant labour policies which contributed to the large influx of alien men who have been filtered out of formal sector employment. on the farms and mines.

2.2.3 Marital Status: Widows and divorcees form the majority of the female informal sector operators interviewed in Magaba/Kopje (53% of the total). This finding is corroborated by the Harare Musika study, which enumerated an even higher percentage. In contrast, the SATEP study, which did not breakdown marital status statistics by sex, suggests a very low percentage of widows and divorcees. (7,8% of the short questionnaire respondents). While Horn's (1986) preliminary findings do not provide statistical data on the percentage of widows/divorcees interviewed, reference is made to the added pressures experienced by widows who are sole breadwinners, and for whom the vending of fruit and vegetables provides the sole source of cash for household requirements and children's school fees.

2.2.4 Dependents: Information on family size and number of dependents of women in the informal sector is limited. It was apparent from the Magaba study that the average female respondent had between four and five children, most of whom were of pre-school or school age. Information on 'other' dependents was inadequate. From the SATEP study, the average number of dependents per respondent was six. The complexity of the issue is apparent when it is considered that many of the dependents are resident elsewhere, and that sources of support (in cash and in kind) are not readily quantifiable. Perhaps the most significant comment that can be made on this point is that informal sector women have heavy family responsibilities, which extend to other adults and children who are resident 'at home' in the rural areas.

2.2.5 Educational Level: The majority of women in the 'visible' informal sector have a low level of educational attainment. In the Magaba study, the median level of education attained was Grade 4, and only one third of the respondents had been able to continue their schooling beyond Grade 5. A sizeable proportion (20%) had never attended school at all. Of those that had attended school, only three indicated that they had done any further studies after leaving school. These findings suggest minimal participation by informal sector women in non-formal education programmes. It can be argued that the SATEP study figures (not broken down by sex) may disguise a higher level of functional illiteracy among women than the aggregate figures suggest (10% without formal education; 55% between Grades 4 and 7). In both studies it is evident that the vast majority of respondents left school several years prior to joining the informal sector.

2.2.6 Duration of Urban Residence: By and large, informal sector women are not recent urban residents. Contrary to the commonly held belief that the informal sector offers a haven to the urban newcomer, the majority of self-employed women interviewed in the Magaba study were long term urban residents. The median length of urban residence was 10 years, with more than one third resident in Harare for more than 20 years. The SATEP study which gave age-specific data, reported a lower percentage of people who had stayed in their present places of residence for more than 5 years. However, the phrasing of the question does not allow one to distinguish between those who have moved from another urban place of residence and those who have moved directly from a rural home.

2.2.7 Employment Experience: Contrary to expectation, and to prevailing assumptions of female activity patterns, informal sector women have considerable employment experience in the formal sector. Slightly more than half (51,8%) in the Magaba study had been employed in the formal sector prior to their involvement in their current activity. While this is a lower percentage than for men (86,5%), it represents a considerable group for whom the formal sector has acted as an in-transit camp for the Informal sector (see also the SATEP study report).

2.2.8 Nature of formal sector experience: Prior employment experience in the formal sector suggested a concentration in domestic work (63,7%) and as unskilled labour in industry. (22,7%). The mean length of time in the last formal sector job for those with prior formal sector experience was 3,8 years. Reasons for leaving formal sector employment differed considerably from those given by their male counterparts. 40,9% indicated that it was due to family or personal reasons, whereas 38,6% indicated termination by the employer (laid off, fired, left the country or closed down business).

2.3 Women's Involvement in the Informal Sector: Prevailing Characteristics

Having sketched the socio-economic profile of the women in the urban informal sector, as revealed by local studies, it is appropriate to consider the nature of their involvement in the sector, and its associated characteristics.

2.3.1 Type of Activity: Firstly, it can readily be observed that there is a marked division of labour by sex. Major informal sector operations for women documented in local studies are concentrated in the area of petty trading. Close to 85% of the women interviewed in the Magaba study fell into this category. The majority traded fruit, vegetables, tobacco, snuff,

cooked food, traditional items and crafts. Few actually produced the goods they sold. (A noticeable exception would be the crochet and basket/mat weavers, not represented in this study).

Data presented in a working paper on the informal fruit and vegetable market in Greater Harare, indicate a 'census' count of some 3 491 vendors - 96,6% of whom were female. (Horn, 1988) Of these, only 2% of the sites surveyed did vendors actually produce the goods they sold. The SATEP study indicated a number of areas of productive activity where no women were represented. (such as electrical repair, shoe repair, tinsmith, upholstery work among other activities). These were contrasted with areas where women were 'better' represented (such as tuckshops, knitting, growing, firewood selling, hairdressing clothes vending and tailoring). The suggested bias against female participation in non-retail activities may be similar to that in the formal sector.

2.3.2 Reasons for Joining: The reasons advanced by women for their entry into the informal sector were primarily economic. Although expressed differently according to the particular circumstances of each one, a number of factors impel women into 'marginal' economic activity. Most cited the need to exercise self-help to support the family, to supplement the husband's low wages and provide a buffer against lack of job security in the formal sector in the face of financial hardships. The 'family problems' mentioned were usually the death of the breadwinner (in the case of widows) or the inability of the husband to find work. Low wages and irregular involvement in the formal sector meant the need to supplement the husband's earnings. In some cases this was a direct factor in the choice of a job, in that self-employment provided a preferable alternative to low-paid jobs in the domestic and agricultural sector.

From the above analysis of reasons given for leaving formal sector employment and for engaging in informal sector activities, it is apparent that the lack of meaningful alternative employment options, coupled with the inability of most respondents to meet their basic needs has led to the drift into small scale informal sector 'enterprises'.

2.3.3 Length of Involvement: This varied considerably among the women interviewed. A majority reported less than 5 years, but 5% indicated involvement in their present activity and location for more than 13 years. Most women indicated that they had learnt their trade from observation. No one reported formal training.

2.3.4 Working Arrangements: With regard to working arrangements, the vast majority indicated that they worked alone from personal choice. The perceived advantages of individual ownership and the one-person scale of operation fell into three main categories: a) avoidance of conflict in the working situation b) the desire to preserve independence without having to 'consult' others and c) the perceived immediate tangible benefits accruing to the individual.

Knowledge of the expected benefits of cooperative or collective enterprise was limited. While some indicated the potential value of exchanging ideas, sharing tasks, and developing specialized skills, the majority of vendors said they did not know what these advantages would be. Nonetheless, a moderate

degree of organization was evidenced to support group interests. These included the banding together of Pedzanhamo stall holders to 'hire' a security guard, the agreed storage arrangements with a street sleeper, and the high level of participation in savings clubs (59%).

2.3.5 Working Conditions: Working conditions were generally found to be poor. The assumption of long working hours was generally borne out by the data. (10½ hours on average in the Magaba study, 10 - 14 hours in the Horn study, and 11½ hours in the SATEP study (short questionnaire). The vast majority of women indicated that they worked 6 - 7 days a week. The location of trading activities generally necessitated long hours of travel to work, with a majority travelling distances ranging from 5 - 20 km to their 'workplace'. A notable exception are the production activities documented in the SATEP study, most of which operated ^{near} the home. Lack of adequate protection from the elements, coupled with absence of any provision for storage of goods, contributed to the 'burden' (financial and physical) associated with daily travel/transport to and from the workplace.

Conditions such as the above have contributed to the prevailing notion that the economic relations in the informal sector are exploitative - whether between employer and employee in the unregulated petty capitalist enterprises documented in the SATEP study, or the 'self-exploitation' that characterises the involvement of women crochet workers investigated by Gaidzanwa (1983).

2.3.6 Incomes: - Incomes are notoriously difficult to assess for informal sector activities, and can be viewed as little more than rough 'guesstimates'. As Davies (1974) pointed out in the Hartley study, lack of written records of incomes and expenditures, the need experienced by many marginal workers to consume daily earnings immediately, and the inevitable fluctuations in takings according to season, make it impossible to do more than make an 'order of magnitude' assessment. Considerable variation was noted in incomes cited, both in the Magaba and the SATEP studies. 54% of the women mentioned average weekly incomes in excess of the then minimum wage for domestic and agricultural work, but only 11% were above the minimum wage in industry.

2.3.7 Constraints: - Major constraints operative in informal sector activities have been well documented in the local literature. Little difference was noted between those cited by the women interviewed and those reflected in other studies. Major problems included inadequate shelter and storage facilities, lack of finance and credit facilities, marketing problems, lack of customers, and legal constraints.

2.3.8 Employment Preferences: Despite the constraints indicated above, the low level of earnings and the associated problems, most women in the informal sector show a preference for remaining in their present activity. 60% of the Magaba female respondents indicated they would prefer to remain in their present job than get a job in industry or return to the rural areas. Similar findings were indicated in the SATEP study report.

2.4 Differences Indicated by the Research Findings:

2.4.1 Between Men and Women in the informal sector

The above profile of female participation in the informal sector suggests some key contrasts with male informal sector operations.

These could be tentatively summarized as:

2.4.1.1. Background Differences Women generally have a lower educational background, less formal sector experience and a shorter duration of urban residence. Widows+ divorcees are over-represented in the female informal sector population; aliens in the male informal sector population.

2.4.1.2 Differences in Working arrangements. It appears that there is a clear cut segregation by sex embedded in the informal sector, as well as an apparent bias against female participation in certain trades, particularly those in the productive sector. This could be partly explained by differential access to capital, training, as well as raw materials. As is found to be the case in other parts of Africa, women are generally disadvantaged in respect to the above. However, it appears that custom and traditional definitions of what constitute 'female' occupations play a large part in regulating the type of activities undertaken by women. The extent to which this is 'real' and externally imposed (as a result of policies which have identified and selectively promoted certain activities considered to be 'female') or, alternatively 'perceived' as a result of internalization of traditional and Western cultural norms and values, has yet to be empirically explored.

2.4.1.3 Stratification Both the SATEP and Magaba studies suggest that women tend to be clustered in the low income informal sector activities. Average weekly incomes reported for 'production' activities, such as carpentry, metal work^{and} canvas bag tailoring tended to be relatively high as compared to those in the petty trading category. Yet, these are the same activities where women are not represented! Significant differences in levels of earnings are evident when respondents are classified according to sex.

2.4.1.4 Motivation and Aspiration In the SATEP report, it is argued that informal sector enterprises can be divided into those which are focused on income generation (the classic informal sector), and those which can best be regarded as small scale capitalist enterprises. On the basis of reasons given for entering their current activity, and their expressed hopes and aspirations for

the future, a tentative division by sex is suggested. The majority of women interviewed in the Magaba study indicated that economic necessity had led them to engage in their present activity. Aspirations for the future expressed a clear-cut preoccupation with and desire to ensure the education and welfare of their children and the establishment of a good home. For most of these women, and for certain categories of men, the informal sector appeared to act as an 'employer of last resort' but one which people perceived as providing a measure of security not offered by the vagaries of formal sector employment. In sharp contrast to this was the group of male-dominated, production activities, where higher levels of capitalization were indicated and security of tenure was greater. Among this latter group, aspirations for the future reflected, to a considerable degree, preoccupation with developing their own business, opening a shop, starting a factory, indicating the prevalence of incipient capitalist tendencies. Preference to remain in the present activity seemed to rest mainly on the perceived benefits of self-employment, independence in decision-making, and the chance to exercise initiative.

2.4.1.5 Training and Apprenticeship: There is little evidence to date, of women undertaking training prior to involvement in informal sector activities, and minimal indication of on-the-job training through apprenticeship. A recent study of women's participation in income-generating projects (Kaseke, 1986) suggests that where skills training is provided in group enterprises, it is usually after the projects have started. Transference of skills derived from employment in the formal sector, though limited for both sexes, is more evident for men than for women.

2.4.2. Between Reported findings and popular assumptions about the informal sector

Local studies have highlighted a number of areas where prevalent assumptions about informal sector operations have been contradicted by empirical investigation. The chart following, based on the SATEP study findings, indicates some of these major contradictions, when data relating to female participants are considered.

This under-representation of women in urban areas had many consequences touching on female participation in industry - both formal, and informal. For this and other reasons, women's involvement in the informal petty trading sector bears only superficial resemblance to the renowned "market women" of West Africa. There is a lack of diversification of product, as well as an absence of the strong associations which characterise and empower the urban women traders of West Africa; - a tradition that has built up over centuries. Women's role in informal urban market trade is of comparatively recent origin in Zimbabwe.

2.4.3.2 The system of labour migration that was prevalent during the colonial period in Rhodesia mitigated against the development of traditional income-generating activities and rural non-farm industries. Left with the burden of agricultural responsibilities, as well as child-rearing, women often acted as de-facto household heads, with little time to engage in food processing, traditional craft production or other activities that were geared for other than immediate family consumption. Although there is little information available about the rural informal sector in Zimbabwe, it would appear that, until recently, it was limited, and mainly restricted to club activities. Once more a contrast with West Africa is apparent.

3. POINTERS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Part I of this paper has been concerned with research findings concerning the informal sector in Zimbabwe and women's participation therein. Attention has been focused on prevailing characteristics, and significant differences that have been highlighted in the studies undertaken over the last 5 years. Of particular significance are some of the findings that suggest differences that exist between commonly held assumptions and empirical 'reality' regarding women's role in the informal sector.

In this section of the paper, I would like to focus on a number of points that emerge from the above, and that, I feel, warrant particular attention in the design and undertaking of the UNIDO research project dealing with the current and prospective contribution of women to Zimbabwe's industrial development.

3.1. Issues of Definition

3.1.1 Informal Sector: As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the 'definition' of the informal sector is contentious at the theoretical level. It is equally contentious at the empirical and operational level. Before a study outline is finalized, it seems imperative to me to clarify the criteria being used to specify the boundaries of the 'informal sector'. A few examples of the 'grey areas' that exist may be pertinent at this point.....

- How does one define the part-time activity of a woman who undertakes contracts on her knitting machine in her 'spare time' at home in the evening and on weekends, while in employment in the formal sector as a secretary... (There are numerous variations of the above)
- Increasingly, cooperatives are responding to the Government's call to register with the Ministry of Cooperative Development. Kaseke's (1986) study of income-generating activities in the high density suburbs of Harare revealed that all but 3,2% of the respondents in his survey had either completed, or were currently going through the process of registering their projects as cooperatives with their Department of Cooperatives. Is a registered cooperative 'informal'.. or does the formalization that takes place when a constitution is drawn up and a cooperative registered differentiate it sufficiently to make this description

... anomalous?... What is the cut-off point in terms of membership - before it is constituted a 'formal' enterprise?

3.1.2 Industry: A further problem of definition stems from the term 'industry', as mentioned earlier. What exactly is meant by the 'industrial sector' in Zimbabwe? As used in the five Year National Development Plan and the Manpower Survey the term would appear to encompass all sectors of the economy contributing to the Gross National Product. The Project Proposal, however, in delineating the project objectives and anticipated outputs, used the term in a narrower, though somewhat ambiguous sense - one that would seem to be restricted to manufacturing, construction and processing activities. Such a definition would, it appears, omit the bulk of women in the informal sector - who are largely concentrated in trading and other tertiary sector activities. It seems to me that this is a crucial consideration, and could be a fatal omission. Country studies included in the UNECA document, Women and the Industrial Development in Africa (1986), reveal similar patterns of underrepresentation of women in small scale manufacturing enterprises, and heavy concentration in petty trading and service activities. I would suggest that unless the current study analyses women's informal sector employment trends in general, and seeks to unearth the factors inhibiting as well as those promoting involvement in secondary sector activities, information will be limited to women engaged in certain specified activities - some of which may well be economically advantaged relative to other sub-groups. To ignore the large number of women working in the primary and tertiary informal sector, will be to marginalize them still further, from the industrialization process, and mitigate against the attainment of the major development objective specified.

3.2. Issues of Methodology

3.2.1 Reliance on Statistics?: Research conducted in ^{the} post-Independence period in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa has readily fallen into the trap of 'survey slavery' - identified and discussed by R. Chambers (1985) Unqualified faith in the value of quantitative statistical analysis, head-counting, and 'snapshot' type surveys, has led to a host of problems. Statistics alone, provide a very inadequate and sometimes misleading basis for planning and action. They also rest on what are very often shaky definitions and categories which are often artificially superimposed at one point in time on what is often a 'dynamic' and continuous reality.... The danger is that they instill a false sense of confidence.

To cite just one small instance of such a statistical 'quagmire' related to the present topic, I would like to refer to some of the inherent contradictions that appear to call into question some of the assumptions underlying the project document regarding the quantitative dimension of women's role in the informal sector.

^{stated}
The SATEP study [^] that males were dominant in the informal activities surveyed. Only 9,5% of the respondents to the long questionnaire and 25,8% of the respondents to the short questionnaire were women. I would like to argue that this was indeed a serious under-representation of females in the informal sector. In an attempt to canvas a broad range of types of activity, it would appear that the research team fostered an inherent bias towards male-dominated informal sector enterprises, being more diversified than those of women. To substantiate this point, I would like to make reference

to the Advance Report on the 1982 Census and the National Manpower Survey of the same year. Approximately 18% (or 1 in 6) of the total number of people employed in the formal sector were women. A quick calculation, based on the census figures and the estimated total in formal employment for the mid-year period, reveals that close to 90 000^{women} (excluding communal farmers) were employed in the informal sector. Similar calculation for males, based on the Census report and the reported % of men in formal employment, suggest that approximately 20 000^{men} are employed in the informal sector. This discrepancy calls into question both the SATEP study finding and the assertion on p. 4 of the project document concerning female participation rates. Or one would be led to question the 'definitions' used in the official statistics (Census). However we might choose to explain this serious contradiction in terms, - we are left with the conclusion that statistics alone are not enough, and that some re-thinking is necessary regarding underlying assumptions of the study. What is ^{also} ~~also~~ apparent is the danger of placing too much reliance on purported statistical 'facts' in undertaking the study.

3.2.2. Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques.

An important choice to be faced when conducting research is the emphasis of the study: what information is sought? Is it qualitative or quantitative? Guided by the mainstream/modernization model of development, quantitative survey were often identified with poverty analysis. Assessment of levels of poverty, degree

of access to and ownership of resources, and various other household indicators of wealth and status have shed much light on the distribution of poverty, often identifying the most acutely needy areas/groups for intervention. But quantitative surveys which identify the poor do little more than reveal the location of the problem....not its root cause. As such, it is only the first step in poverty analysis. An alternative and essential complementary aspect of poverty analysis is the type of study that focuses on the poverty-generating process. In the analogy developed by Haaland and Keddeman, (1981) - it is not enough to know the 'number of players' and the value of their cards....one must also understand the 'rule of the game' according to which a given society produces 'winners' and 'losers'. In an interesting working paper based on their research in rural Somalia, they demonstrate how in-depth case-studies which provide insight into the operation of poverty-generating processes can help to reveal the 'rules of the game' which often defy quantitative formulation.

So, it appears that qualitative studies, micro-level research making use of fruitful case studies, can provide a necessary counter-balance to the 'count, cost and deliver syndrome' (Haaland and Keddeman, 1981) which is often associated with quantitative, measurement studies. So, a pertinent question to raise at this juncture, is - is a survey based on a neatly delineated, widely administered interview at one point in time sufficient as a data-gathering technique? I would suggest that it is not... and that careful consideration needs to be given to supplementing survey data with the more qualitative, in-depth micro-level

information based on participant observation ^{of} selected areas of female informal sector participation. These in-depth case studies could help to provide insight into the factors influencing women's integration into the development process through informal sector involvement. They would also provide an important time dimension for some investigation of what is essentially a dynamic and not a static phenomenon. Inclusion of participative and group interview techniques may provide a necessary supplement to the artificial type of "1 by 1" interviewing, and may help to offset some of the 'demand characteristic' syndrome that this fosters.

3.2.3. Professional Bias?

Another methodological issue that arises relates to the approach to be adopted. The SATEP study was explicitly economic in its orientation. The team of researchers were all economists. Third world research is frequently subject to the 'professional bias' which tends to filter reality through the sieve of one particular discipline, while leaving out important issues that are not explicit to that discipline's concern. In so restricting the area of interest, there is often a distortion in the perception of reality - and an opportunity to promote cross-disciplinary cooperation in research is lost. While I must admit to a 'sociological bias' in the questions asked and approach adopted in the Magaba study, I feel that it is necessary to investigate women's role in the informal sector wholistically.. We should be fully conscious of the social, cultural and political considerations that are crucially important in explaining and predicting economic behaviour. Unless there is a focus on the women in the informal sector, rather than 'female enterprise', we will have an incomplete and misleading grasp of their present and prospective contribution to and integration into the

development and industrialization process.

3.3. Issues relating to Content and Coverage

3.3.1 Differential visibility and its implications for research

Yet another issue arising from the earlier studies is that of differential visibility. In the informal sector more than the formal sector, women are differentiated in terms of the visibility of their activities. Those that are undertaken outside the home in public places are more visible than those undertaken within the home. Those operating within a legal socially acceptable framework are more 'visible' than those on the fringe of the law. Those undertaken in urban areas or in the 'roadside/tarmac/growth ^{point} zones of rural areas have greater visibility than those operating in the remote, less accessible rural 'periphery'. Those group projects initiated or sponsored by NGOs, Government Departments and other sponsors, have higher visibility than those operating without the backing of powerful support networks. As far as group activities are concerned, 'visibility' may often be correlated with the extent of financial backing provided in the form of loans, capital equipment, grants etc.

Given all the above, it is imperative that selection of any respondents in ^{the} study population be done with careful attention to potential biases in representation. A question I would raise is, how best can we ensure adequate representation of women who are operating in low-visibility informal sector activities?

3.3.2 Coping with heterogeneity

Although the SATEP study incorporated three rural areas in its survey population, important regional and environmental differences in rural informal sector involvement have yet to be documented. This is particularly important, given the tendency for informal sector activities to utilize local resources which differ from one climactic and agro-economic region to another. To date, it would appear that no hard data is available on small scale rural industries in commercial farming areas, former purchase areas - or Resettlement areas. It would seem necessary to do a preliminary assessment of the prevalence of such activities by region, before identification of survey areas is actually undertaken.

3.3.3 Lifestyle or Livelihood?

One pertinent issue which arises in connection with content and coverage relates to what I would venture to call the mistaken content^{ion} that informal sector involvement represents a 'livelihood'. This can be contended on two counts - the first being the presumed adequacy of earnings, and secondly the appropriateness of the concept. I would suggest that preliminary studies indicate that it is, in fact, far more all-embracing...namely a lifestyle. For many women the informal sector offers social as well as economic benefits... these being in the form of adult companionship during the day, access to common space for work (something not allowed for in the 'grid' type of housing layout that places value on individualism and privacy); a relative measure of independence, and for some, relief from tensions and pressures

inherent in an overcrowded^{housing} situation in a high density area. Provision for travel from home to 'work' for many, coupled with the 'distance' that this creates, may actually represent a considerable measure of adaptation of rural patterns of life to urban conditions.

3.3.4 Attitudes towards Collective Mobilization

A crucial area for investigation, given the socialist transformation which Zimbabwe is working towards - is the whole area of mobilization towards cooperatives activity. What is the experience of women in informal sector activities?... What are the beliefs and attitudes that foster this - and those that inhibit it? Preliminary findings from both the SATEP and the Magaba studies suggest that most urban informal sector women work alone. Cooperative arrangements, where they exist, are of a limited nature. Even where enterprises are run jointly by two or more partners, the mode of operation appears to be primarily individualistic. For lower income people, it could be asserted that being close to the margin of survival increases the tendency to 'risk minimization' by retaining the 'tried' existing mode of operation, in preference to the establishment of collective arrangements with strangers. Lack of understanding of the potential advantages of collective endeavours was limited among the women interviewed in 1982/83. It remains to be seen whether the national 'consicentization' effected since that time has indeed enhanced understanding and openness to engaging in such collective efforts.

Other Caveat Finally - it should be noted that a number of other caveats exist. I would like to suggest that many of these can best be revealed by inviting women in the informal sector

to speak from their vantage point what the issues^{are} as they see them. By assuming that they know what to ask, researchers often miss the deepest issues that touch the lives of the people who are coolly documented and analysed as 'respondents'. In the present case - there is^a dearth of information on child care and home management arrangements of women in the informal sector. It seems that few have actually asked how women cope. It is important to discover in, the sense popularized by Paulo Freire, what are the generative themes for these women?... What stirs them to talk from the heart of their experience? Perhaps in discovering these caveats of knowledge about women in the informal sector we will come closest to perceiving their present and prospective contribution to the development process - and their role in the socialist transformation of Zimbabwean society.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Only the findings from the Magaba area were analysed and reported in One-Dollar Workplaces (Brand, 1986). The present figures incorporate an additional 34 female respondents from the Kopje area in addition to the 51 female Magaba respondents.

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