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INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT:
TRENDS AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE
LEATHER AND LEATHER PRODUCTS INDUSTRIES*

Prepared by
the UNIDO Secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

Research and studies on women in development made in the early 1980s indicate that women represent a significant proportion in the labour force in both agriculture and industry in most countries.

In the developing countries, trends show that, numerically, the proportion of women in the labour force has increased to the point where, in some places, it is higher than any developed country. For example in Haiti, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand, women's share in manufacturing employment is more than 40 per cent, and in Hong Kong, the Taiwan Province of China and Tunisia, their share is about 50 per cent, while in no developed market economy do women account for more than 31 per cent¹.

This increased participation has brought greater recognition of women's important contribution to the economic growth and development. However, employment in manufacturing, especially in developing countries, has not always been positive for women.

While there have been gains in terms of overall employment in industry, *women have not been able to integrate into all occupations and sectors to obtain conditions and content of work comparable to men's*. In addition, women account for a disproportionate share of unemployment in most countries, have more limited access than men to jobs, especially at higher occupational levels, and have difficulty in securing adequate technical training or even information on finding and applying for available jobs.

It is difficult to estimate the number of *women engaged in the industry*. This is due to the fact that the number of women employed in the formal industrial sector has been underestimated in the official censuses and national industrial surveys. The main reasons are:

- (a) the lack of gender-specific employment information collected during industrial surveys;
- (b) the methods in which employed household workers are defined and classified in household surveys;
- (c) the lack of coordination between government agencies which collect information on women in the industry and industrial classification schemes that exclude industrial branches in which women tend to be employed;
- (d) the lack of a definition of the informal manufacturing sector and the lack of documentation on employment.

In Africa the share of manufacturing in total employment has remained generally lower than that of developing countries in Asia. The experience of the developed countries has been different. In Germany, UK and USA women lost out in the manufacturing sector in terms of the total number employed, although they increased or practically maintained their overall share.

Referring to statistics collected in selected countries in 1981, 1983 and 1985, the following industries are the main sources of employment of women in most countries: textiles and clothing, food processing, chemical products, printing and publishing, and electrical machinery and apparatus.

¹ Ref.: "1989 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development", UNITED NATIONS ST/CSDHA/6.

Referring to the occupational level of distribution of women, the gap between the position of men and women is still wide. In production work, women are mainly recruited for unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Industries that employ women have acquired an image of being low-paying ones. There is a generally poor representation of women in administrative and managerial occupations. Also a comparison of *wage rates and earnings* shows that in both developed and developing countries women on average earn far less than men.

Another important event driving the modern manufacturing sector and influencing the integration of women in industry, has been - from the 1960s onwards - the *relocation of industries from developed to developing countries*, especially those industries with high labour requirements and low capital inputs. New technology has made it possible to separate complex production processes into skilled operations and unskilled or semi-skilled ones. Thus, companies have been able to locate research and development primarily in developed countries, while using labour of women in developing world for labour-intensive, routine, intermediary operations (example: clothing, textiles and electronics industries). Specially designed export processing zones have been set up in developing countries to attract foreign investment. Experience in many countries, in particular in South-East Asia, has shown that these zones can contribute substantially to generating and promoting manufactured exports and to providing employment opportunities to young women who have, therefore, a chance to enter the manufacturing sector. Much of the employment in the export zones has proven to be transitory, not well paid and at the lower end of the occupational level. In some cases, employment conditions have improved because corporations from industrialized countries operating in them have been under pressure to extend the employment standards to the processing zones.

However, it is becoming clear that the inter-country differences in labour costs have become less important as an investment incentive for multinational companies. The industrial environment of the host country is assuming much greater significance. As the labour-intensive processes tend to decline, the major ways that a country can attract technologically more advanced lines of production are by upgrading infrastructural facilities and by ensuring a steady supply of service and technology-related skills. Hence there is a fear that as production in export processing zones is upgraded and diversified, the proportion of women workers will decline. It is, therefore, important to adopt well-defined and explicit training policies to counter this emerging trend.

Another important issue is the participation of women in the formal and informal sectors. The official statistics tend to reflect employment in large-scale factories, and work in small, *less formally organized and unregistered units* is usually not recorded. One example can be the textile industry where women constitute the bulk of the "home-base" workers, because this is a way of combining unpaid household work and child care with wage labour. In the industrialized countries, new technology has revolutionized the way production is planned and executed and has given rise to widespread subcontracting to smaller production units.

The growth of the informal sector opens a new channel of employment. In fact, factories that are governed by labour and employment laws are often less willing to employ women than men because women are perceived as being "more expensive" (maternity leave, nursing breaks etc.). *In smaller units, employers often prefer to hire women, who are seen as more manageable.* However, a large proportion of these own-account workers, working either at home or in various workshops, do not enjoy any protection of labour legislation that applies to employees in the formal sector, and their earnings are much lower.

Yet the informal sector absorbs the majority of the work force in many developing countries. In India, 89 per cent of the working women are self-employed, and a large proportion of them is engaged in industrial activities ².

Overall, it can be said that there has been an increase in women's share of industrial employment in developed and developing regions. The continuation of this trend, however, will depend on the state of technology and developments in the world's industrial restructuring.

In the *formal industrial sector*, where large- and medium-scale industries dominate, women's prospects of employment are likely to continue to be in light industry (agro-based industries) or in assembly-line jobs. However, the *informal sector* is likely to absorb the greater number of women seeking jobs in the industry in all regions.

From studies conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) or Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), women's participation is likely to depend on whether the economy of the country in which they live has strong or weak connections to the world economy. In fact, only a limited number of developing countries have a substantial linkage to the world economy through their industrial basis; these are the ones in which technological innovations designed and implemented in developed countries are more likely to have immediate implications on trade relations and subsequently on female manufacturing employment.

II. WOMEN IN THE LEATHER AND LEATHER PRODUCTS INDUSTRIES

1. GENERAL

According to the UNIDO Medium-Term Plan 1994-1999:

" Any policies and measures addressing the development of the manufacturing sector must take into account the crucial role that the female industrial work-force assumes both for economic and industrial progress for the achievement of social development objectives...

... The objective of the UNIDO programme for the integration of women in industrial development is to enhance the contribution of women to the industrialization process of developing countries, and enable them to participate on an equal basis in industrial decision-making and the benefits of development.

During the above period, *"UNIDO will ensure that women are more fully integrated in technical cooperation and promotional activities as well as in policy study and research programmes and that they are equal beneficiaries especially in projects related to small-scale and agro-industries as well as to the development of appropriate technologies and human resources"*³.

In order to facilitate the achievement of these objectives, an intersectoral approach has been elaborated for promoting the consideration of women in UNIDO's technical cooperation activities.

² International Labour Organization, Yearbook of Labour Statistics, various years.

³ UNIDO IDB 10/5 1992.

The participation of women in the leather and leather products industry's activities, with the exception of some countries in the South Asia Region, has a short history due to cultural barriers, employment procedures and a lack of opportunities to enhance women's skills at various levels.

UNIDO's Leather Unit has, in the past three years, incorporated the special needs and interests of women within programme designs in order to foster and strengthen women's role in the leather and leather products sectors.

The large-scale programme "Hides and Skins, Leather and Leather Products Improvement Scheme", US/RAF/88/100 and associated country projects, as well as the Integrated Leather Industry Development Programme in India, DP/IND/92/400, include, among others objectives, the integration of women in the leather and leather products sectors' development process aiming at a balanced gender participation in production and commercial activities.

The inclusion of a women-in-development expert in the African Programme is entirely in line with the strategies of the UNIDO Medium Term Plans for the periods 1990-1995 and 1994-1999 to promote the consideration of women in UNIDO's technical cooperation activities. Footwear and leather goods industries are the major sectors in the leather industry in which women in Africa are very actively involved.

In spite of stated government policies for increasing women's role in production and income in all the participating countries, there are still conflicts between women's economic status and wider development plans and processes. Due to discriminatory attitudes on the side of the employers and lack of technical skills on the part of the female workers, the number of women employed in the leather industry at specialized worker, managerial and entrepreneurial levels is very low. Women's lack of technical skills partly results from their discrimination as they are, in almost all cases, denied any training or skill upgrading opportunities.

The work on "women-in-development" began by identifying appropriate measures and activities to enable women in the region to fully benefit from the Programme. The following main activities were carried out:

- a) creation of gender awareness in the leather and leather products sector;
- b) analysis of employment patterns of women in the leather industry;
- c) assessment of training needs.

As main recommendation it clearly emerged that actions aimed at improving the socio-economic status of women should concentrate on the following three-pronged approach:

- a) Prepare women for better employment alternatives through training in industrial activities (management, technical skills, entrepreneurship etc.);
- b) Create an awareness of the role of women in the leather industry by sensitizing managers, employers, project personnel, industry associations;
- c) Create self-assertiveness among women working in this sector to achieve the advancement of their status.

Under the Indian Programme comprehensive plan will be designed for the development of the various segments of the leather sector, which will include strategies for reaching various target groups, including women. Although the industry in India employs a large number of

women, both at the cottage level and in modern production units, the number of women in supervisory and managerial positions is negligible.

As planned, a women-in-development expert was attached to the Indian Programme in August 1993 to study the situation and recommend a plan of action.

2. THE REGIONAL AFRICA PROGRAMME (US/RAF/88/100 AND ASSOCIATED COUNTRY PROJECTS) - SUMMARY OF CONSTRAINTS⁴.

Women employment patterns in the African leather industry indicate that there is a positive trend in the progress made by women in the sector. The close association of the leather industry with the textile industry, where women predominate, makes the leather industry an attractive place for women. The leather industry is thus not perceived by women as a man's domain. However, the organizational structures of factories, and opportunities for advancement and employers attitude to women employees are more or less similar in all the seven countries covered by the project. Most obstacles faced by women in the leather industry can, therefore, be classified and summarized regardless of the enterprise and/or country where they are employed.

a) Tradition and culture

Women who work in the leather industry are constrained by cultural patterns and stereotyping which are transferred from homes to industries and ultimately exclude them from the labour force. For example, *men are generally seen as bread earners and heads of families*. When there are retrenchments women are the first to go.

Most managers speak of the importance of traditional African cultural gender roles and relations in an enterprise's management. Some managers believe that traditional gender hierarchy provides enough reason for maintaining distinction and the gender status quo in leather enterprises.

They see traditional gender inequality, not so much in its negative aspect but as a social arrangement that must be handled carefully and abided until it is ready (through evolution) to disappear. Most managers argue, that failure to do so, even in leather enterprises, would plunge the African social set up, especially the family unit, into chaos. This view is a strong indicator of how traditional cultural views are translated and applied in a modern enterprise.

In the hides and skins subsector there is a general assumption that "farmers" are always male. Because of this assumption, *hides and skins improvement programmes* have not really bothered to incorporate gender issues. Yet, in most rural areas there are many women heads of households and animals are usually tended by women and their children.

b) Legislation

Employers and government officials in ministries of industry in some of the countries insist that there are equal opportunities for men and women and that their employment policies do not discriminate. As a result it is taken for granted that no gender specific policies and strategies are required for enhancing the position of women who work in this sector.

⁴ Most of the information given in the following paragraphs is taken from the Women-in-Development Expert's summary report of August 1993 on her two-year assignment within the Regional Africa Programme.

However, the existing legislative measures, e.g. equal opportunity laws, are not a synonym of the automatic translation of laws into working policy programmes. Prejudices against women seem to be wide spread in spite of the laws in various countries that forbid discrimination on the grounds of sex. This implies that laws for the protection of women can be futile unless the mechanism exists to monitor their implementation.

c) Company policy and management

In leather firms the absence of women in management positions is conspicuous. There are only a few women supervisors. Almost all leather factories did not have a company policy for gender-equal opportunity. In some countries, factories insist that *tanning* is not a suitable job for women. As a matter of policy, such tanneries did not employ women (the paradox is that rural women have always done heavy jobs as carrying buckets of water and load of firewood over long distances).

d) Women's career in the leather industry as perceived by management in the sector

The common problems hindering women's possibility to advance in their careers are manifold. The most important ones can be summarized as follows:

- Lack of managerial and technical skills and qualifications for traditional social reasons relating to unequal and sometimes different access to education;
- Cultural upbringing which discourages women to be assertive and lack of self confidence to accept the challenge of top management in the commercial world, as well as limitations to work late or to travel;
- Men's lack of knowledge of the potential of skilled women as a work force;
- Stereotyping of women. If one woman fails as a supervisor, then no other woman will ever succeed. These perceptions influence adversely the company policies and result in discriminative measures towards women employees, as for example in training programmes.
- Fear of investing in women on the grounds that they will marry and leave the job or go on maternity leave.
- Assumption in some countries that men and women cannot work side by side.

e) Women entrepreneurs' perception of their problems

Lack of facilities and other resources

Women entrepreneurs in the leather industry lack proper equipment as well as a varying combination of marketing, managerial, technical and financial skills. Usually they have fewer resources than men and are impeded by lower levels of education and literacy. Women have fewer contacts, less bureaucratic know-how and bargaining status than men, which still further confine their productivity and profitability.

Credit

Women entrepreneurs in the leather industry identify financing as the most important bottleneck to initiating and expanding manufacturing activities. Lack of access to credit, either

due to discriminatory laws or bank regulations, is a major constraint for them. In some countries married women are treated as legal minors. If they are to obtain credit from a commercial bank, they require their husband's permission which may not always be forthcoming. In almost all the seven countries covered by the Regional Programme there are no credit institutions appropriate for the needs of women entrepreneurs. The available credit sources do not extend these easily to women entrepreneurs.

Access to raw material

Many women entrepreneurs in the leather products industry do not have access to raw materials, especially leather. They find it hard to buy in bulk, most tanneries prefer to sell to big firms which buy in bulk. Since most women entrepreneurs operate on a small scale, they are not members of professional leather associations and hence not part of the network.

Land/working space

Women who would like to start their own tanneries or even leather goods workshops fail to start because they cannot obtain working space. Existing rental accommodation is too expensive for the women going into business for the first time.

Skills training

Women's lack of access to education and training opportunities means that women start their businesses without adequate skills.

f) What does a woman need to succeed it in the leather industry?

Both women employees and entrepreneurs in the leather industry say that in order to enhance their status in this sector, the following are necessary:

- A good educational background plus technical training
- A supportive legal environment
- Support and encouragement from the immediate supervisor and the top executive
- Ability to develop necessary skills to assert their place in the leather industry;
- Ability to plan their careers strategically
- Exposure to different situations and ability to take each situation as a learning experience
- Capacity for hard work
- Capacity to be positively assertive when necessary

A few of the women in the leather industry in the African Region have managed to acquire the above profile. Such women have managed to develop a positive approach to establish their position. More and more are demanding to be trained so that they can upgrade their skills and be more competitive.

III. CONCLUSIONS

1. Generally speaking, improving women's opportunities requires *long-term systematic strategies* aimed at reforming prevailing structures.
2. *Short-term*, ameliorative approaches to improve women's employment opportunities are ineffective unless they are combined with long-term strategies integrating especially women in economic decisions that shape their lives. "*Women's voices must enter the definition of development and the making policy choices*"⁵.
3. Gender-based subordination is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of both men and women and is usually viewed as a natural corollary of the biological differences between them. It is reinforced through religious beliefs, cultural practices, and educational systems (both traditional and modern).
4. In the industrial sector, organization of workers in traditional industries (many of which tend to be female-dominated) is as necessary as in export industries and free trade zones. In petty trade and services women suffer particularly from lack of credit, access to markets, and obstacles in obtaining licenses.
5. In the leather and leather products industries, the productivity and capacity to work of both women employees and entrepreneurs is also often constrained by cultural norms and practices.
6. In the last two years, the UNIDO's Regional Africa Leather Programme has carried out the following activities: (a) starting the process of gender awareness in the leather industry (b) analysis of employment patterns of women in the industry (c) assessment of their training needs (d) organizing of training courses in leather goods technology specifically for women.
7. The Regional Africa Leather Programme emphasized that the need to develop the capabilities of both men and women is an inseparable and integral part of the human resource base of the industry. An organization with a gender-friendly environment will build its growth on the strength of each sex.
8. Clearly the leather industry's challenge is to create an environment in which both men and women can equally contribute to and benefit from increased productivity.

⁵ "Ref. Development, Crisis, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives", DAWN, 1985.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY IN GENERAL

a) Recommendations to governments

1. Proper legislative frameworks should be designed and implemented for reaching gender equality.
2. An adequate social infrastructure should be provided to facilitate the entry of women in the industry.
3. As part of the human resource planning process, women's training programmes at all levels (science, technology and management) should be promoted in addition to specific industry-related skill training.
4. Each macro-economic measure on women's employment should be monitored.

b) Recommendations to international organizations

1. Development of an efficient gender database on the participation of women in the formal and informal industrial sectors.
2. Identification of areas of future industrial growth where programmes can be developed to train women with the required skills.
3. Support of training programmes aimed at upgrading women skills in all industry-related activities, including production, supervision, administration, research and quality control.
4. Monitoring the impact of industrialization on women in developing countries.
5. Ensuring that protective legislation is extended to the informal sector.

c) Recommendations to non-governmental organizations and donors community

1. Act as catalysts by lobbying national governments and international agencies to increase the participation of women as equal partners in industrial development.
2. Assess the impact of industrialization on women and encourage the introduction of measures to ameliorate negative aspects and facilitate women's integration.
3. Mobilize funds for the support of programmes for improving the status of women in the industry.
4. Organize and support training programmes that address such needs as basic education, skill upgrading and non-traditional and technical training programmes for younger women.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO THE LEATHER AND LEATHER PRODUCTS INDUSTRIES

a) Recommendations to the leather professional associations and to local and international women's organizations

1. Take an increasingly active role in integrating gender issues in the leather industry at all levels by identifying issues of relevance to women in that industry, and ensure that these issues are taken into full consideration in the leather industries' overall policies and plans.
2. Organize programmes with a comprehensive gender content for managers in the leather industry that will allow them to examine their attitudes toward their female employees and work out strategies for integrating their skills in the work process.
3. Organize a series of leather technology training programmes for women in the footwear and leather goods subsectors. Encourage footwear and leather goods manufacturing units, especially those of medium size which in some cases are threatened with extinction through poor quality and small range of finished goods, to send their female workers for training. Such programmes should provide technical know-how and also cater for women's needs and interests such as lack of assertiveness and confidence.
4. Sensitize policy makers and planners to the problems and issues affecting women in the leather industry, based on relevant statistics as appropriate.

b) Recommendations to governments

1. Elaborate proper legislative frameworks on gender issues, including material on women employment possibilities, benefits and policies within the leather and leather products sector.
2. Keep up-to-date data on the present status of women in the sector, their prospects and opportunities for further development and related issues at national levels.
2. Ensure that women entrepreneurs in the leather industry have access to credit and physical space for their production. In this regard, pursue partnerships with conventional lenders who could assist women and/or establish a loan fund to provide first-time credit for women in the leather industry considered "bad risks" by banks.
3. Organize workshops to discuss ways of increasing the proportion of women in the leather industry.
4. Explore, publicize and address possible impediments to female workers in the leather industry.

c) Recommendations to International Organizations

1. Design programmes including a combination of training (i.e. management, financial skills and assertiveness training) and improved access to raw material, markets and technology.
2. Organize study tours and exchange visits for women entrepreneurs/managers to widen their perspectives and encourage training of women in non-traditional modes of occupation especially in tannery work and effluent treatment.

3. Promote women employees' apprenticeship programmes to established enterprises to enable them to acquire skills.
4. Organize a series of workshops in various countries to deliberate on strategies to assist women in the leather industry.
5. In view of the activities conducted within the UNIDO Regional Africa Programme, the possibility of developing similar activities in other World Regions such as South-East Asia and South America should be explored.