

# Key focus areas

**W**omen's access to employment is constrained by various factors, including inequality in access to education and training and productive resources, household responsibilities and gender stereotypes. Where women are employed, they face discrimination and disadvantage. They are employed in lower paid, less secure jobs and they have limited access to economic resources, including land, capital, credit and technology.

Their contribution to the economy in terms of unpaid labour remains unrecognised and undervalued.

Women are the last to benefit from periods of employment growth, but they are the first to suffer when employment levels fall. The unemployment rate for women in South Africa, particularly rural women, is shockingly high.

Women are also often found in jobs where standards are deteriorating. More women are being drawn into atypical work, as opposed to full-time, permanent, regular employment. This means that they face a severe problem of underemployment.

To create both more and better jobs for women, a number of crucial policy interventions are needed:

□ ***An integrated policy development approach***

All policy formulation should be sensitive to the inherent bias in so-called 'gender blind' policies. These are

policies which do not explicitly discriminate against women, but will have a different impact on men than women because of their different positions in the labour market.

□ ***Mainstreaming women in development strategies***

Women's concerns must be directly integrated into all economic policy development.

□ ***Harmonising work and family responsibilities***

There should be equal sharing of family responsibilities. Employers must provide childcare facilities and offer flexible working time. Government must provide social services and infrastructure to help families cope with family and work responsibilities.

□ ***Public sector employment***

The public service is a major employer of women. The quality of jobs created in the public service can play a major role in promoting gender equality.

Cutbacks in government spending will mean that women will lose their jobs.

□ ***PWPs and social investment funds***

PWPs can provide short-term, targeted poverty relief to women. If the PWPs are linked to a longer-term development programme, they can provide more sustainable benefits for women.

□ ***Gender sensitive macro-economic and industrial policies***

Rapid trade liberalisation has a

substantial impact on those sectors which employ predominantly women. Budget and fiscal policies are often developed without a strong analysis of their impact on women. Policy-making should include an explicit analysis of the impact such policies will have on women.

- **Education and training**  
Education and training programmes should specifically target women.
- **Access to productive resources for women.**

A central challenge to a targeted job creation strategy for women is addressing the deeply instilled patriarchal values and ideology held and supported by most male policy-makers.

### **The informal sector**

The informal sector includes a wide range of economic activities which tend to be small scale and are not formally recognised as enterprises or employment relationships. This sector is an important part of the South African economy; The 1995 October Household Survey estimates that informal sector workers make up 17% of the total employed population of South Africa. Seventy percent of these workers are women. In the poorer provinces, the figures are higher. Workers face poor working conditions, unstable employment, high levels of competition and low earnings. They have no legal protection. Opportunities are limited by lack of access to resources such as land and credit.

Retrenchments in South Africa's formal sector will push more and more workers into the informal sector.

Job creation policies often focus on micro-enterprises and the informal sector. Because of the poor conditions in these sectors, this can lead to the continued marginalisation of many workers. No employment strategy can ignore the

informal sector. In order to avoid the pitfalls, however, the following interventions need to be made:

- **Developing a comprehensive informal sector database**  
A much more comprehensive understanding of the sector is required than we have at present.
- **Incorporate the informal sector into the formal sector**  
The informal sector should be subject to the same regulations as the formal sector. Informal sector activities which generate substantial income should be linked to industrial policy and pay tax.
- **Develop a regulatory framework**  
Even if the informal sector is brought into the formal sector, it will still pose unique regulatory challenges. A large proportion of informal sector labour is self-employed. Nevertheless, dependencies and exploitation can exist even amongst the self-employed if there is a strong reliance on a supplier. These relationships need to be regulated.
- **Design effective development strategies**  
Development of informal sector activities is often constrained by lack of access to finance, education and productive resources. Barriers which prevent development must be removed.

### **Rural employment**

Rural South Africa is characterised by high levels of unemployment and poverty. Employment and tenure are extremely insecure for the black rural population. Black women face particular marginalisation.

Employment creation in the rural areas poses many challenges. These include the physical limits to agricultural expansion (such as the availability of fertile land and water), the fact that land redistribution, on its own, without further resources to allow for productive activity, is not enough to

ensure survival, and limits to current government land policy.

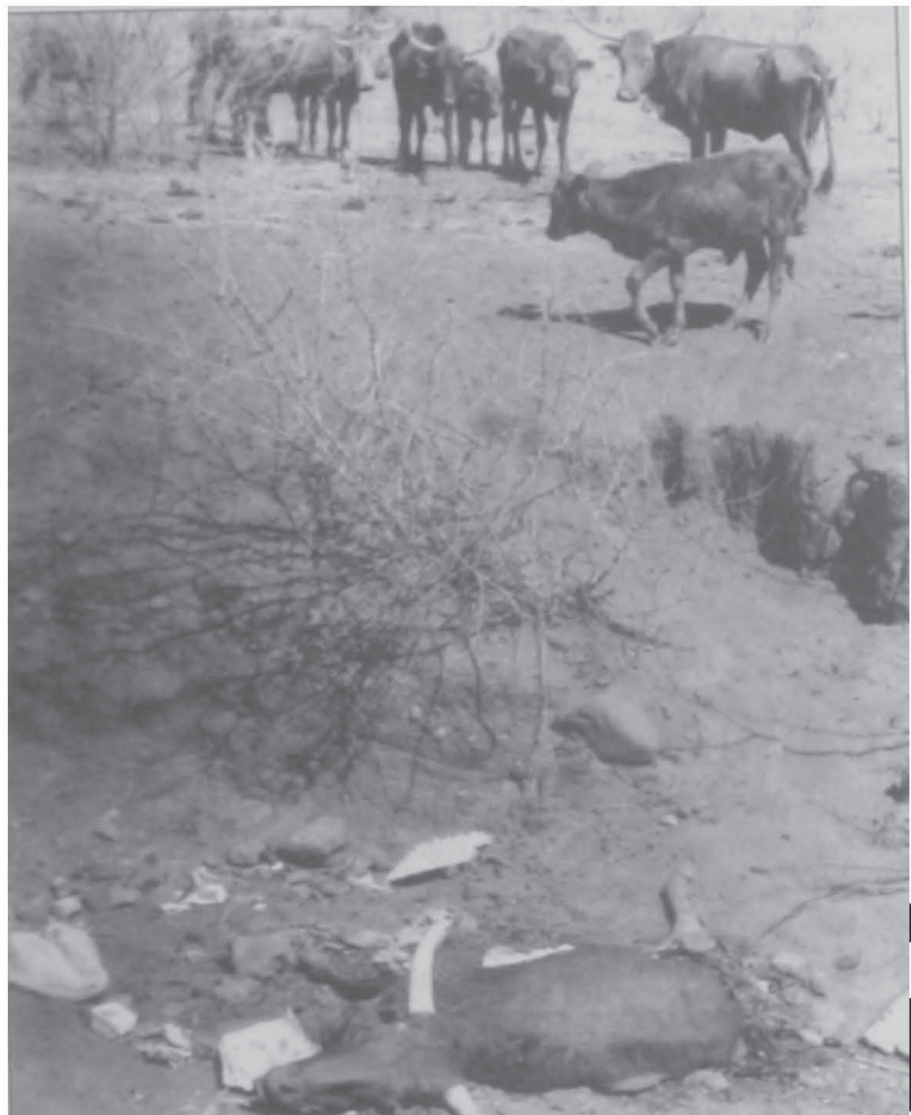
A vision for rural employment needs to take into account both economic justice and equity issues. This means a twin strategy of returning people to their land and of securing and improving the conditions of employment of rural people.

### **Redistribution**

Millions of people could gain access to opportunities for productive activity through a comprehensive programme of land redistribution. People settling on the land would have to use it productively. This can only be done with state support. The higher the level of support, the more jobs can be generated, especially if support is geared towards producing and marketing surpluses. The greater the support, the greater potential for spin-offs in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy in rural areas.

#### **Women**

At present, women perform the bulk of subsistence and small-scale agricultural production, although, in most cases, they do not own the land, are denied the right to make decisions about its use, and are not paid for their labour. If, with state support, surpluses are produced and sold, these workers could be paid for their work. More importantly, however, equal and independent access to land for



*State support is needed for people to use the land productively.*

women must be made a right.

#### **Co-operatives**

The state can also play a role in establishing and transforming agricultural co-operatives, which could be purchased collectively by members over time.

#### **Processing and storage**

The decentralisation of processing and storage of raw agricultural produce would benefit the local economy.

#### **Share options**

Redistribution could include infrastructure. Farmworkers could use household grants to buy into farms. This

would improve their job security and conditions of work. Such schemes need to be approached carefully, however, to ensure that workers do not end up carrying unsustainable enterprises.

### Shifting the balance

Formal collective bargaining on the farms is the only way to ensure that no further jobs are lost and that conditions are improved. Although there is a legal framework in place, skewed power relations on the ground make bargaining a paper right only. The state has a vital role to play in this regard.

It is also essential that a halt be called to the current trend of retrenchments and evictions on the farms. State intervention is also needed to improve conditions of work. Once again, while legal rights exist, they are not being implemented.

The state should consider:

- the establishment of a national training fund, financed from farm profits;
- pro-active monitoring of farms;
- extending education in the rural areas;
- education on legal rights;
- incentives for the formation of area-based negotiating forums capable of dealing with land conflict.

In the current socio-political environment, farmers are shifting towards forms of employment which allow them to bypass legislation. The use of casual and sub-contracted labour is growing rapidly. Women are taking up jobs previously set aside for men, but in a cheapened, deskilled and temporary form. The extension of basic conditions of employment to sub-contracted and seasonal workers is a priority. The rights of migrant and child workers also need to be protected. Other policy options include:

- Shifting to labour-intensive production*

South Africa's land use policies have

been distorted by apartheid policies. Even the World Bank accepts that South African agriculture would be more economically viable if it used more labour.

### *Regional integration*

Initiatives which allow the rest of southern Africa to make fuller use of its fertile land and which allow South Africa to develop processing infrastructure, which is also highly labour-intensive, should be explored. Care must be taken, however, that South Africa does not come to dominate the regional economy. ★

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