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Gender Aspects of Urban Economic
Growth and Development

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Working Papers No. 137

July 1997

Gender Aspects of Urban Economic Growth and Development

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This paper was presented at the Conference on Human Settlements in Changing Global Political and Economic Processes, 25-27 August 1995, Helsinki, sponsored jointly by UNU/WIDER and the Finnish Ministry of the Environment.

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UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER)
Katajanokanlaituri 6 B
00160 Helsinki, Finland

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Printed at Pikapaino Paatelainen Oy, Helsinki

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ISSN 0782-8233

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ABSTRACT

The urbanization process is frequently shaped by prevailing constructions of gender. The recognition of this phenomenon is vital both in diagnosis and policy terms. This paper aims at illustrating the importance of gender in three major related aspects of urban growth and development: (i) transformations in household structure; (ii) shifts in household survival strategies and; (iii) changing patterns of employment. The paper concludes that although urbanization is gendered in all parts of the developing world, variability in patterns and outcomes in different countries makes it difficult to identify particular ways in which policy interventions might diminish gender inequalities in urban environments. Besides this, the paper concludes that unless gender inequalities are attenuated in rural settings there is little scope to effect major improvements in existing disparities. Although the 1980s and 1990s have seen an increasing acknowledgement of women's contribution to development, so far, policies which incorporate women into the development process have shown little concern about empowering women themselves.

I INTRODUCTION

Gender is an essential consideration in the analysis of urbanization in developing countries. Not only does urban economic growth and development often provoke changes in gender roles, relations and inequalities, but the urbanization process itself is frequently shaped by prevailing constructions of gender. In other words, the causes, nature *and* outcomes of urbanization may be highly gendered, and recognition of this phenomenon is vital both in diagnostic and policy terms. Yet as Caroline Moser (1995:225) has argued:

Although more marked in the 1960s and 1970s than it is today, gender-blindness still prevents many researchers from appreciating the pivotal nature of gender relations in determining women's participation in urban life, their roles in resolving urban problems and planning for urban futures.

The main aim of the present paper is to help to clarify the importance of gender by illustrating its relevance in three major inter-related aspects of urban growth and development: i) transformations in household structure; ii) shifts in household survival strategies, and iii) changing patterns of employment. Attention is focused on low-income groups in towns and cities during the last decade-and-a-half of recession and economic restructuring, with reference, where possible, to material based on primary case study data from Mexico, Costa Rica and the Philippines.¹ Aside from the general argument that gender is pertinent at all stages of urban evolution, points highlighted in the analysis include the importance of looking at households and their internal dynamics when examining the

¹ I have conducted research relating to gender, households and urban poverty in Mexico since 1982, in Costa Rica since 1987, and in the Philippines since 1991. Household surveys (encompassing questionnaire and in-depth semi-structured interview work) have always formed a major element of field methodology. Funding over the years has come from the Economic and Social Research Council (Award numbers: R000231151, R000233291, R000234020), the Nuffield Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust, the British Academy, and the Suntory Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines, the University of London Central Research Fund, the University of Liverpool and the London School of Economics. I am grateful to all these bodies for their financial assistance. I would also like to thank Dr Cathy McIlwaine (Research Officer on the two projects carried out in the Philippines in 1991-2, and 1993-4), and Dr Valentine Moghadam, who acted as discussant of the paper at the Human Settlements conference, for their stimulating, helpful and encouraging comments.

socio-economic corollaries of urbanization (particularly as they concern gender), and the need to acknowledge diversity in patterns and impacts of urban growth in different places. The study concludes with a review of possible directions for policy arising from gendered urban development.

II 'GENDER AND HOUSEHOLD': DEFINING TERMS

Use of the term 'gender' is increasingly common in academic and policy circles, although it is still often misconstrued as a synonym for 'women'. For this reason, it is important to specify what gender signifies in specialist discussions of the subject. 'Household', similarly, needs to be defined and elucidated, and an explanation given for its relevance within the context of gender analysis.

In brief, gender is a social construct. Societies build meanings around sexual difference that act to create of a range of 'masculinities' and 'femininities', and these frequently circumscribe people's behaviour, activities, resources, power and status. As Julia Cleves Mosse (1993:2) sums up:

Gender differs from biological sex in important ways. Our biological sex is given; we are born either male or female. But the way we become masculine or feminine is a combination of these basic biological building blocks and the interpretation of our biology by our culture.

Since societies often differ markedly in the meanings they assign to sexual distinction, both across space and through time, gender is a highly variable concept (see Peterson and Runyan 1993:5). This is further exacerbated by the intersection of gender with other aspects of social differentiation such as age, race, class and sexuality. In short, there is nothing fixed or monolithic about gender roles, gender relations or gender inequalities.²

² *Gender roles* refer to what men and women do and/or are expected to do, and how they behave and/or how society dictates they should behave. *Gender relations* refer to the interaction between the sexes, whether as individuals or groups, and encompass notions of power, subordination, negotiation, conflict and so on. Again there are normative elements scripted into the various modes of male-female interaction. Finally, *gender inequalities* denote the differential experiences and entitlements of men and women that

Besides the necessity of acknowledging a plurality of patterns of gender, it is critical to recognize that the reasons underlying them also vary, and not only between, but within countries.

If it is necessary to contextualize gender before analysing its significance among different groups and places, then this is equally relevant when it comes to looking at 'the household', with Robert McC. Netting *et al.* (1984:xxvi) going as far to assert that finding a 'clear-cut, cross-culturally valid definition of the household is as problematic as the blind man's description of the elephant (see also Harris 1981; Kabeer and Joekes 1991; Robertson 1984; also Brydon and Chant 1989:8-11; Pothukuchi 1993; Young 1993:14). Although there are a range of difficulties with this definition,³ it would appear that the notion of households being first-and-foremost residentially-based 'housekeeping units' is more often than not meaningful to people themselves, and use of such criteria does permit some comparative work between countries.

Having pointed out that households are usually defined on the basis of their pragmatic/functional and residential/morphological characteristics, it is important to stress that they are also conduits for familial and gender ideologies, especially where membership of household units is kin-based (see Kuznesof 1989:169). This is one reason why it is difficult to look at gender without reference to household organization. Most people are born into households, and households are a fundamental context for socialization (the process by which ideas and behavioural codes are learned and/or acquired). Although there are many different types of household, and not all contain adults of both sexes, it has often been stressed that households not only play a major role in gendering socialization but occupy a 'privileged position in gender analysis as a

in large part owe to their different roles and the unequal degrees of power and autonomy between them.

³ Among the major difficulties with this definition of the household are: i) that the emphasis on shared domestic/consumption activities tends to obscure the fact that participation in household activities may be highly unequal between members (according to gender and age, for example), not to mention the allocation of benefits which arise from them (see for example, Blumberg 1995:10; Browner 1989; García and de Oliveira 1994:209; Harris 1981; Murray 1987; Sen 1987 and 1991; Young 1992:136-7); ii) that household survival may not depend entirely (or even predominantly) on the efforts of household members, but on wider networks of kin, friends and neighbours with whom there may be active and reciprocal links (see Lomnitz 1977; Nelson 1992; Peterson 1993; Schmink 1986; Willis 1993; Yanagisako 1984).

primary site of women's oppression' (Kabeer and Joekes 1991:1; see also Townsend and Momsen 1987:40). Women's frequent subordination within the household owes to number of factors: that adult males are commonly at the apex of household decision-making and authority; that there is usually a division of labour along lines of gender whereby women take exclusive or substantially greater responsibility for unremunerated tasks such as domestic labour and childcare, and that women have less ability than men to transcend household boundaries and enter domains of activity which are either accorded higher value or status (for example, full-time waged employment), or which are associated with greater degrees of personal fulfilment, privilege and/or autonomy (for example, extra-domestic recreational pursuits, social interaction with people outside kin groups and the immediate neighbourhood).

At the same time as gender inequalities are often fomented *within* households, however, it is also important to recognise that various types of gender inequality can be mediated *by* the particular type of household to which people belong. For example, when households lack a male 'head', adult women may be in a very different position to those with partners in terms of having greater freedom and control over their own lives.⁴ Similarly, when households consist of a mixed range of kin, rather than just parents and children, patterns of work, resource allocation, decision-making and so on may also vary. In brief, therefore, the particular identities and experiences of individual men and women are likely to be heavily influenced by the nature of their household organization and membership, notwithstanding that households may metamorphose several times in the course of the life cycle, and indeed often within the space of

⁴ The term 'head of household' is a problematic one, characteristically imbued with assumptions about one person in a residential unit being 'responsible' for other members and/or being 'in charge' of household organization. Where households contain adult men, a male is almost invariably designated as household head by census takers, by government officers, and often by household members themselves. The persistent association between maleness and household headship derives from a number of factors such as the frequent primacy of men in kinship networks, the export of Eurocentric ideals of family organization during the colonization process, and men's usual position within households as major breadwinners and/or principal arbiters of decision-making (see for example, Folbre 1991; Harris 1981). Having said this, what household headship actually entails in practice is rarely held up to scrutiny (see Stolcke 1992:138n), and as Jeanne Illo (1992:182) has pointed out, constant reference to a singular household head, and especially one who is male, not only masks the complexity of household allocation systems but can reinforce male power in society at large.

only a few months (see Chant 1991c:66-7; Fonseca 1991:135). Given that it is arguably as difficult to separate gender and the household analytically as it is pragmatically, a useful starting point for looking at gender aspects of urban economic growth and development is the question of transformations in household structure during urbanization.⁵

III HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AND URBANIZATION

Household structure embraces two main components: sex of the household head and household composition. The latter refers to membership and describes the types of persons households consist of, whether kin or unrelated individuals, parents and children with or without additional relatives, people of the same sex and so on. A wide variety of household forms comprising varying combinations of headship and composition have been identified for developing countries (see Brydon and Chant 1989: 134-8; Chant and McIlwaine 1995:319 for typologies). Broadly speaking, however, mainstream debates on household change during urbanization have concentrated upon size and composition, and more specifically, the shifting proportions of nuclear and extended households (nuclear households being those consisting of parents and children, and extended households usually being based around a parent-child unit and including other relatives as well, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, grandchildren and so on).

3.1 Transformations in household composition: the nuclear versus extended debate

Until relatively recently, the dominant assumption about household change was that extended households predominated in rural areas, and as societies urbanized nuclear households became more common. Much of the theoretical weight behind this came from structural-functional/modernization concepts of global evolutionary convergence in family structure (see McDonald 1992; Netting *et al* 1984:xv). One of the main reasons given for the extended-to-nuclear transition in both historical and contemporary settings, was that the spread of capitalist economic

⁵ It is important to note that all types of households in urban areas can usually be found in rural areas as well (see Brydon and Chant 1989:135 and 139). As such 'transformations in household structure' refer to the fact that the relative proportions of various household types may change as a result of urbanization.

development, urban settlement and the rise of individualized wage employment removed the rationale for co-residence among kin in order to maximize resources for production such as land, tools and labour. Reduced needs for households to provide the means of reproduction (education, health care and so on) as the state and larger private entities took on these functions were also seen to fuel the process of family nuclearization (see Bock *et al.* 1980; Gugler and Flanagan 1978; Hulme and Turner 1990:83-4; Hutter 1981; Muncie and Sapsford 1995:14-16). Additional factors, largely emanating from Marxist discussions, were spatially-uneven capitalist development, that they provided a more secure market for mass-produced goods, and that they both reflected and reinforced the individualist ideologies underpinning capitalist production (see Barrett 1986; Leacock 1972; McDonald 1992; Seccombe 1980).

With respect to gender, Marxist-feminist theorists tended to see the twin processes of nuclearization and urbanization as intensifying domestic divisions of labour, increasing women's confinement within the home, and leading to losses in female status. This was premised on assumptions of a greater amount of complementary in rural gender roles where production was the responsibility of households and the spatial demarcation between productive and reproductive activities relatively minimal (see for example, Leacock 1972; Nash 1980, Scott 1986). Modernization theorists, on the other hand, tended to emphasise how nuclearization forged a route to greater equality between the sexes, by releasing women from patriarchal traditions characteristic of large extended rural households, and by allowing greater female participation in extra-domestic work (see Bridges 1980; Goode 1963; Mitterauer and Sieder 1982).

While many of the points raised both by modernization and Marxist theorists in support of an extended-to-nuclear trajectory (and its gender corollaries) may have some relevance in some cases, the idea that theoretical deduction can be any substitute for systematic observation, or that the principles derived can be used in a culturally-neutral way and applied everywhere, has come up against serious criticism, especially from feminist/post-modernist quarters (see Segal 1995; Yanagisako 1984). Besides this, the existence of any generalized pattern of household transformation has been thrown into question by an increasing spate of empirical studies of urbanizing societies past and present (see Berquó and Xenos 1992; Netting *et al* 1984; see also Moore 1994:1). The putative predominance of extended households in rural areas, for example, has been

challenged by research which reveals that household composition is highly variable: whether nuclear or extended membership prevails is contingent on a wide spectrum of factors including local forms of agricultural production, land availability and inheritance, kinship patterns, and demographic variables such as life expectancy (see for example, Flandrin 1979; Laslett 1972; Mitterauer and Sieder 1982; Peil and Sada 1984; Stivens 1987). Beyond this, it has also been found that extended households may be as or more prevalent than nuclear households in urban areas (see, for example, Lu 1984 on Taiwan; Peil and Sada 1984 on Sierra Leone; Castillo 1991:45, Pineda Deang 1992 on the Philippines), and/or are a greater proportion of households in cities than in the countryside.⁶ Indeed, household extension among low-income groups in many urban areas seems to have become more marked during the last 10-15 years, especially in countries which have undergone recession and major economic restructuring such as Mexico (Chant 1994b; Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 1995:69; González de la Rocha 1988; Selby *et al.* 1990) and Ecuador (Moser 1989a).

Reasons put forward to explain the existence of extended units among the urban poor include migration (urban households often take-in migrant relatives from rural areas who come to towns and cities to study, to work, or to reunite with kin who have established themselves in urban environments), housing shortages, the need to pool labour for childcare or for greater economic security or mobility, and/or social and kinship obligations (see for example, Brydon 1987; Chant 1985a; Cutrufelli 1983; Gugler and Flanagan 1978; Peil and Sada 1984; Stivens 1987; Varley 1993:18). Although there is some evidence to suggest that extended households in urban areas may be smaller in size and contain a more limited range of kin than in the countryside (see Bock *et al.* 1980; Gugler and Flanagan 1978:132; Pine 1982), again this is highly dependent on context. While recession in Mexico, for example, seems to have resulted in a greater incidence of household extension and an increase in average household size among the urban poor during the last decade or so, in cities in the Philippines (Chant and McIlwaine 1995: 284-5) and Zimbabwe (Kanji 1994: 117-8), there appears to have been some 'shedding' of

⁶ For example, in research on three centres of in-migration in the Philippine Visayas - Cebu City, Lapu-Lapu City and Boracay Island - it was found that around half the 240 households interviewed in low-income settlements were extended, whereas only 28 per cent of all rural migrants in the sample had actually been living in extended households prior to migration (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995:285).

relatives from extended structures. Such variations, relate, amongst other things to different types of household extension, to different rationales underpinning the incorporation of relatives at different points in time, to the levels and longevity of urbanization in different countries, and to economic and infrastructural disparities between rural and urban areas, not to mention the macro-economic context in which policy reforms have occurred. In Mexico, for example, urbanization is now well-advanced, rural-urban differences in the provision of schools and health facilities are less marked than in the past, and the tide of rural-urban migration has slowed substantially in recent years. While reciprocity among kin is clearly observed and valued, urban households in the last decade have often extended for what might be termed 'positive' pragmatic and strategic reasons (for example, relatives have joined forces in the interests of active collaboration in productive or reproductive work and have often benefited economically in the process) (see Chant 1994b). In the Philippines, on the other hand, large-scale urbanization is a more recent phenomenon and rural-urban differences in social service provision, welfare and employment continue to be significant. Coupled with the fact that people still subscribe strongly to notions of familial obligation, extension of households in urban areas has often taken the form of young dependent relatives moving in with urban kin in order to take advantage of the opportunity to study. Unfortunately, greater poverty has meant that for some households this is becoming a 'luxury' they cannot afford (Chant and McIlwaine 1995). In short, while there is little doubt that household composition usually undergoes some change in the course of urban development, these changes take different forms at different times and in different places and they can by no means be generalized.

Recognition of diversity and context is also relevant when it comes to looking at gender aspects of household composition in urban areas. In some places, extended households may provide more liberating domestic environments for women than in others. For example, extended households in Middle Eastern cities tend to be associated with the continued subordination of women (especially those who reside in the homes of their husbands' parents and where mothers-in-law exert considerable authority) (see Mernissi 1985; Mincos 1982). In places such as Mexico and Zimbabwe, alternatively, household extension can result in greater personal power and expanded roles among women, especially where they are able to share or delegate domestic labour and to take-up remunerated work (see for example, Benerá and Roldan 1987:31; Chant 1985a;

Kanji 1994:116). Having said this, although individual women in certain instances may benefit from household extension, it is also true that gender divisions of labour in general may remain intact since it is almost invariably female kin who assist with unpaid household labour (see Chant 1994b). Beyond this, it is also important to stress that employment provides few so-called 'emancipatory' prospects when economic crisis has placed many women in nuclear, as well as extended, units in the position of having to generate income. For women in nuclear households this can either mean taking on a heavy 'double-day' of labour, or passing their domestic tasks to daughters with potentially deleterious effects on the latter's education and/or subsequent status in the labour market (see Dierckxsens 1992 on Costa Rica; Moser 1989a and 1992, Rodríguez 1993 on Ecuador). Similarly, while women's increased employment in extended or nuclear male-headed households might in some cases enhance their personal autonomy and/or democratise decisions on household expenditure (see for example, Chant 1991a: Chapter 7 on Mexico; Tripp 1989 on Tanzania), in others, it may merely lead to greater exploitation, especially where women's earnings are apportioned by men for extra-household expenditure (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995 on the Philippines).⁷ Although differences in household composition in different towns and cities may thus have varied impacts on gender divisions of labour, power and privilege, it is important to remember that household structure also comprises the element of headship, which in some ways seems to be associated with more consistent changes in prevailing patterns of gender during urbanization.

⁷ Evaluation of whether employment empowers women or acts to subordinate them further is clearly difficult, if not impossible, without reference to broader structures of gender inequality, and whether women are actually at liberty to control the income they derive from work (see Blumberg 1989 and 1991; Faulkner and Lawson 1991:40-1; Moghadam 1994:99-102 and 1995a:112; Safa 1990 and 1993). Having said this, although the relationship between female employment and social and economic autonomy has been identified as 'a vexed one' (Moore 1988:111), it would appear that women themselves usually feel there is a connection (ibid; see also Mencher 1989:128). Beyond this, Rae Lesser Blumberg (1995:1) has gone as far to assert that 'women's control of income engenders not only their own empowerment but also the creation of wealth and well-being at levels ranging from the micro (family) to the macro (nation).

3.2 Transformations in household headship: the rise of women-headed households

If it is difficult to discern any general trends in household composition as societies urbanize,⁸ this is possibly less the case with household headship, with women-headed units widely noted as forming a rising proportion of households in many parts of the developing world.⁹ Although women-headed households are by no means a new phenomenon,¹⁰ nor are they unique to urban areas, many of the factors responsible for female-headed household formation arise through urbanization, and through gendered processes of urbanization at that.

Current estimates of women-headed households at a world scale are in the region of one-fifth of all households,¹¹ representing a proportion of 19.1 per cent in Asia and the Pacific (ibid).¹² Although in some countries

⁸ This is partly because comparisons often have to be drawn from small-scale case study material, since censuses seldom indicate the precise nature of household composition, even if they often classify single and multi-person households separately, and sometimes indicate whether or not households contain children.

⁹ Although it is more common for censuses to give breakdowns for household headship than household composition, it is also important to bear in mind that there are problems with establishing *accurate* trends in female household headship. This is mainly because official/national data sources are often not particularly clear about how they classify headship, and even where they are, the bases for classification often change over time. For relevant discussions see Chant (1995; 1997), Illo (1992), Kalpagam (1992), Kumari (1989), Oliveira (1992), Visaria and Visaria (1985) and Youssef and Hetler (1983).

¹⁰ Female-headed households have a long history and/or have been numerous at various historical junctures in a range of countries: for example, female-headed households represented substantial proportions of the population in certain regions of 19th century Brazil (Kuznesof 1980), Nicaragua (Dore 1995), and Costa Rica (Gudmundson 1986), not to mention many parts of West Africa and the Caribbean (see Brydon and Chant 1989; Moore 1994:7-8 for discussions and references). None the less, as Janet Townsend and Janet Momsen (1987:53) have argued, 'the ubiquitous occurrence of such households is new'.

¹¹ Varley's figures are based on weighted regional averages from United Nations data relating to the years 1971-1982, and go a long way to refining previous unweighted estimates that placed the global total at around one-third of households or higher (see Varley 1996).

¹² Nancy Folbre (1991) performed a similar exercise using UN data from the early 1980s, and produces different figures on the basis of a more disaggregated regional breakdown. While some regional averages are based on statistics from only two or three countries, proportions of female-headed households are given as 17.7 per cent for the

such as India and the Philippines, female household headship does not seem to have risen much or at all since the 1960s, in other (especially in Latin America and the Caribbean) it has grown quite substantially. In Brazil, for example, women-headed households increased from 5.2 per cent to 20.6 per cent of the household population between 1960 and 1987 (Buvinic 1990 cited in González de la Rocha 1994:1), and in Mexico, they rose from 13.6 per cent to 17.3 per cent between 1960 and 1990 (Chant, forthcoming). In Jamaica, 39 per cent of households were headed by women in 1975 compared with only 28.6 per cent in 1946 (Wyss 1990 cited in Folbre 1991:82), and in Guyana, women-headed households grew from 22.4 per cent to 35 per cent of the household population between 1970 and 1987 (Patterson 1994:122).

One of the main factors held responsible for growth in female household headship is gender-selective migration (see Brydon and Chant 1989; Chant and Radcliffe 1992). Gender-selective rural-urban migration, for instance, results in localized imbalances in sex ratios, and where there are pockets of 'male shortage' there is greater likelihood that women will lack co-resident partners or fathers.¹³ As such, the degree and nature of gender-selective movement to urban areas is often relevant in determining both the frequency and spatial distribution of women-headed households within countries. Broadly speaking, this is borne out by regional patterns: where men dominate rural-urban migration streams, as in South Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, urban sex ratios tend to be masculine and women-headed households are usually more characteristic of rural than urban areas; in the towns and cities of East and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, on the other hand, rural-out migration is female-selective, urban sex ratios are usually feminine and levels of female household headship are higher in towns and cities (see Gilbert and Gugler 1992:75-7; also Brydon and Chant 1989:146; Rogers 1980:66; Townsend and Momsen 1987:53). Although demographic factors such as these are by no means the only variables affecting the emergence of women-headed units, and in some cases there may be little correspondence between the relative proportion of women in urban areas and levels of female headship (see for example, Chant 1995 on

Caribbean, 14.5 per cent for Latin America, 14 per cent for East Asia, 13.6 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa, and 5.7 per cent for South Asia (see Folbre 1991:95-8, Table 3.1).

¹³ Gender-selective international migration is clearly also important insofar as it exerts an influence on national sex ratios.

the Philippines), in others there would appear to be positive correlation.¹⁴ For example, data from the 1984 census of Costa Rica indicate a strongly feminine urban sex ratio, with an average of only 91 men per 100 women in urban localities at a national level, compared with a sex ratio of 107 men per 100 women in rural areas (see Chant 1992:55).¹⁵ In the same year, women-headed households were 22.7 per cent of urban households but only 12.9 per cent in the countryside (Chant 1997:131). In Zimbabwe, on the other hand, where women-headed households are around one-third of households nationally, only half this level are found in the capital Harare (Schlyter 1989:27), which at some level undoubtedly relates to the fact that urban sex ratios are strongly masculine (at an average of 114 men per 100 women in 1982) (see Chant and Radcliffe 1992:6). Regardless of the extent to which levels of female household headship are actually mirrored in feminine sex ratios, however, examining some of the reasons behind gender-selective migration provides other insights into spatial differences in female headship, as well as indicating how gender is fundamental to the nature of urbanization processes.

Gender-selective migration from countryside to town is frequently indicative of the relative roles of men, and particularly women, in rural and urban labour markets. In two of the most highly contrasting regions, Latin America and Africa, for example, women's involvement in agricultural production seems to play some part in determining whether they move to towns or stay in the countryside (Chant and Radcliffe 1992:5). In Latin America, women's documented share of employment in agriculture is low (below 20 per cent in most of the continent). Whereas in Africa it is high,

¹⁴ Other variables affecting female headship are too numerous to mention in detail here (see Chant 1997: Chapters 3 and 4 for a fuller review of the demographic, economic, legal-institutional and socio-cultural factors precipitating the formation of female-headed households in developing countries). However, one critical one which appears to depress the incidence of women-headed households in Philippine cities is the social opprobrium attached to women living alone (this itself arises, amongst other things, from the illegality of divorce, the importance of family coherence and 'smooth interpersonal relations' in Philippine society, the child-centredness of Philippine culture, and emphasis on the moral propriety of women). Young Filipino women, especially those who have had children out of wedlock or who have suffered marital breakdown are often absorbed within the homes of parents or relatives, thereby becoming 'embedded' female-headed sub-families as opposed to independent female-headed units (Chant and McIlwaine 1995; see also Buvinic and Gupta 1993 for a more general discussion of 'embedded' female headship).

¹⁵ This was the last census carried out in Costa Rica at the time of writing this article.

at over 40 per cent and in some western, central and southern areas, over 50 per cent (see Dixon 1983; Townsend and Momsen 1987).¹⁶ In short, women who remain in rural areas of Africa are more likely to be able to sustain a livelihood than their Latin American counterparts (Brydon and Chant 1989:125-6). As for urban labour markets, it is perhaps no surprise that female-dominated migration is most common in areas where demand for women workers in towns and cities is comparatively high, such as Latin America and Southeast Asia.¹⁷ Being able to earn an income is not only an important motive for female migration, but also increases women's capacity to head their own households (see Bradshaw 1995a; Chant 1991a). Indeed, higher levels of female labour force participation in urban than in rural parts of Latin America undoubtedly help to explain why female-headed households are rarely more than 10 per cent of the population in rural communities, but up to 25 per cent in many urban areas (Browner 1989:467).

Notwithstanding that women's access to employment and/or livelihood in rural and urban areas is important both in female-headed household formation and in gender-selective migration, too much emphasis on differential labour opportunities between countryside and town is inappropriate when the *supply* of women (and men) to labour markets is by no means unconstrained, but filtered through gender aspects of household structure and organization, and shaped by wider ideologies of family, kinship and gender (see Chant 1991b; Chant and Radcliffe 1992). Indeed,

¹⁶ Estimates of female employment clearly have to be interpreted with some caution since women are often engaged in subsistence production and this may not be recorded in official surveys (see Evans 1992). It is also important to recognize that women's livelihood possibilities in rural areas with also be determined by their relative access to land (see Bradshaw 1995b).

¹⁷ In contrast to many parts of South Asia and Africa where opportunities for low-wage employment for women in services and industry have traditionally been low (see Stichter 1990:17; Townsend and Momsen 1987:1987:46-7), demand for female labour in Southeast Asian cities has risen with the expansion of multinational export manufacturing and the growth of un- or semi-skilled service occupations such as domestic work, commerce and the sex trade. In Latin America, domestic service has traditionally absorbed large numbers of female migrants, although the growth of urban-based export-manufacturing work in countries such as Mexico, Costa Rica and Puerto Rico have also played an increasingly important role in providing employment for female entrants to the job market. Women's shares of urban employment in these latter regions are usually at least 30 per cent (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Chant and Radcliffe 1992:5-7, for discussions).

having mentioned that income is an important motive for female migration, it is critical to recognize that women may not move to towns of their own volition but at the behest of, or through pressure from their rural families. This seems especially to be the case with young unmarried women (see Chant and Radcliffe 1992:7; Chant and McIlwaine 1995). The movement of young women, in turn, may be fuelled by a range of factors, including their possible position as 'surplus' labour in rural communities where they are not accustomed to working in agriculture or there is much unemployment (and mothers work as full-time house persons), and, in Southeast Asia in particular, expectations that young women should 'repay' their parents for having raised them. Indeed, the obedience, sense of duty and notions of filial piety inculcated in daughters in countries such as the Philippines, Taiwan and Indonesia means that they are often deemed likelier to fulfil the needs of rural families as labour migrants than sons (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Foo and Lim 1989:219; Mather 1988; Trager 1984; Wolf 1990). Alternatively, gender ideologies in other contexts may inhibit any independent mobility among women at all. In South Asia, for example, social and cultural constraints upon women are such that most have traditionally migrated only to marry or to join husbands already established in urban areas (see Kabeer 1991:257 on Bangladesh). Whatever patterns of mobility occur, however, it is clear that gender plays an important part in structuring them, whether by means of gender ideologies governing personal conduct, divisions of labour in rural homes, or gender differences in employment and/or production in countryside and town. Indeed, prevailing patterns of gender may at one extreme also play a part in influencing the nature of urban economic activities insofar as multinational firms are undoubtedly attracted to areas where they may be able to capitalize on the lower wage costs associated with the recruitment of female workers. Having said this, even if urbanization itself is often predicated in part on gender differences and inequalities, one outcome (as already mentioned) may be reduced male bias in household headship, which can have important implications for gender at the domestic level.

Although the 'feminization' of household headship during urbanization may bring about changes in gender roles and relations (primarily through removing the immediacy or directness of male control over women's lives), it can by no means be regarded as signalling unilateral improvement in women's status. Indeed, in rural areas in which women are 'left behind' by male migrants as *de facto* female heads, material and psychological well-

being may well deteriorate.¹⁸ In many parts of South Asia, for example, women's ability to farm family plots may be limited by lack of access to finance for inputs, access to machinery and by social taboos surrounding their freedom of movement and activity (see Drèze 1990; Kumari 1989:82-3; Rahat 1986). On top of this, men may still exert control over their households from a distance: in Pakistan, for example, most women 'still have to refer to the male head of household before major production decisions are taken, even when he is absent from the village for months or years on end' (Parnwell 1993:107). When women remain heavily reliant on their husbands for remittances to ensure household subsistence, and these are small or irregular, women's vulnerability obviously increases. At one extreme, as Diane Elson (1992a:41) has argued:

Male migration reduces the expenses of the household - but all too frequently reduces household resources to an even greater extent... Migration, in a growing number of cases, appears to be a polite word for desertion. It is a male survival strategy rather than a female survival strategy.

Beyond this, *de facto* female heads have to undergo the stress associated with separation from their men folk, and/or the possibility that their relationships may culminate in abandonment or divorce (see Nelson 1992 on Kenya). They may also find that as long as they are attached to men that they do not achieve the status or entitlements normally accruing to household headship within their communities (see Hetler 1990 on Indonesia; and Schlyter 1989 on Zimbabwe).

As for *de jure* female heads, who are more likely to be found in urban areas (especially in Latin America and the Caribbean), the situation may be somewhat different. Although these women may come-up against various forms of discrimination in the labour market, in their communities, with public officials and so on, at least they are likely to be free of patriarchy at the domestic level, especially where they are not subject to the control of

¹⁸ The term *de facto* female heads is used here to refer to women who head households on a temporary basis while husbands or partners with whom they continue to have a relationship are away working, whether in another part of the country or overseas. Generally speaking *de facto* female heads which, in the present discussion, denote women who as a result of non-marriage, separation, divorce, widowhood and so on, are not living with, or receiving economic support from, a male partner (see Youssef and Hetler 1983 for a wider discussion of the use of these terms).

male relatives in wider kin groups and/or the authority of adult sons.¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, female heads of household are not usually in the position of having to defer to anyone when making decisions about their lives, and evidence from a range of contexts indicates that aside from this, the benefits of female headship include greater self-esteem, more personal freedom, higher degrees of flexibility in terms of taking paid work and in selecting the types of jobs they do, enhanced control over finances, a sense of achievement in parenting under difficult circumstances (in the case of lone mothers),²⁰ a reduction or absence of physical and/or emotional abuse, and the chance to move beyond the confines of the gendered divisions of labour common to heterosexual partnerships (see Bradshaw 1995b; Chant 1985b; Chant and McIlwaine 1995). At the bottom line, and increase in women-headed households tends to 'visibilize' a traditionally marginalized group and brings to the fore that women are in need of equal rights as citizens as men (see Chant and Ward 1987:7). Such changes in household structure accompanying urbanization are clearly also significant for household survival strategies and their gendered aspects in urban areas.

¹⁹ For example, research in the Philippine Visayas revealed that female heads of household are often shunned by other people in the community and/or their wider kin networks, partly due to disapproval of non-marital births and/or marital breakdown, partly because of the kinds of economic activities into which female heads are often forced (for example, sex work), and partly because other women wish to emphasize their own moral/social conformity by distancing themselves from women who have failed to achieve the legitimacy accruing from residence with a husband and children in the context of a legal union (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995).

²⁰ Lone mother (or female-headed one-parent) households, which consist of an unpartnered woman and her children, are usually the majority of female-headed units in developing countries. However, other types include female-headed extended households (single-parent core plus additional relatives), women on their own (single person/women households), single-sex/female-only households (these usually consist of unrelated women, but in some contexts can be family-based structures where female relatives maintain independent residences from male partners and kin), female-dominant/predominant households (where related or unrelated women constitute the majority sex in the household and have senior positions compared with male members such as infant sons), and grandmother-headed households (where women head households consisting of themselves and grandchildren) (see Chant 1997: Chapter 1).

IV GENDER AND HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN URBAN AREAS

'Survival strategies' is a term used fairly commonly to describe the activities of underprivileged individuals and households (usually the latter) for the purposes of daily reproduction.²¹ Survival strategies in urban areas are generally seen as encompassing three main elements: income-generation, domestic labour (including childcare and consumption), and social reproduction (aspects of reproduction such as education, health care, housing and community welfare, where household labour combines with services provided by the state or private sector).²² The analysis of household survival strategies not only indicates how the poor are affected by urban economic development, but also helps to identify where needs lie for policy purposes. This has become increasingly critical during the last decade or so of recession and structural adjustment as low-income groups in many developing countries (especially those in urban areas), have been subject to immense pressure to protect living standards in the wake of declining wages, shrinking employment, rising prices, and cutbacks in social services (see Elson 1992b; Sparr 1994a and 1994b; Stewart 1992).²³

²¹ Other terms used in the literature include 'household livelihood strategies' or 'systems', and 'household coping strategies' (see Daines and Seddon 1991: 9 *et seq.*; Selby *et al* 1990:66-8 for discussions).

²² The main distinction between urban household survival strategies and those in rural areas lies in the fact that agricultural production (whether subsistence or cash crop) is usually absent from the former, which is not to say that there may not be some small-scale food production and animal rearing undertaken on land plots in urban self-help settlements. None the less, this rural-urban distinction is significant since the existence of subsistence agricultural activities may blur the boundaries between production and reproduction, and sometimes between male and female work as well (see Brydon and Chant 1989:12). Having said this, it is obviously important to acknowledge that urban and rural household survival strategies may be linked through transfers of money, agricultural produce, information and so on, which, as suggested earlier, may well be gendered.

²³ It is sometimes argued that households in urban areas have been harder-hit than households in rural areas because a major arm of economic adjustment policy has been to switch production from non-tradable to tradable activities, and in cases where rural activities are more tradable and labour-intensive than urban industries (as they often are), rural people stand to glean greater benefits. This is especially true of small farmers who are growing much of their own food for household consumption as well as producing for export, since although the costs of imported inputs such as fertilizer may rise, this, theoretically, is compensated by increased prices for their produce. Urban dwellers, on the other hand, who are more likely to be engaged in non-tradable activities

Indeed, in many places, increased concentrations of people in urban areas together with the relatively greater negative impacts of structural adjustment policies in towns and cities have narrowed the gap between rural and urban poverty (see Amis 1995:146; Wratten 1995). Indeed, shifts in household survival strategies in the context of economic restructuring provide numerous examples of the gender inequalities inscribed into and frequently intensified by recent urban economic change, and indicate the importance not only of looking *at* households when considering grassroots experiences of urban poverty, but of looking *inside* them in order to explore how the tab for daily reproduction is picked up by individual men and women (see also Wratten 1995:18).

Although in most societies, household survival requires effort from all household members, for the most part, adult men's only substantial input is in the sphere of paid work, and/or, in cases where people live in self-built shelter, the construction of housing. Women, on the other hand, have traditionally been mainly engaged both in domestic labour and social reproduction, and in recent years have substantially increased their participation in income-generating activities as well (as discussed in more detail in the third section of the paper in the context of gender aspects of urban employment). This involvement in all three major domains of household survival has been referred to as the 'triple role of women' (see Moser 1989a and 1992; also Elson 1989; Kabeer 1994:275 *et seq*).²⁴ While men during the crisis era may have had to work harder to generate income (whether by working longer hours or taking additional jobs), there is actually relatively little evidence to support this, let alone that they might have directed greater effort into other (unpaid) domains of activity (see Gindling 1993). Indeed, even where wives have ended-up in full-time employment, men have seldom increased their participation in domestic labour or childcare to help even-out intra-household loads (see Chant 1994b; Dierckxens 1992; Engle 1995:155; Gabayet and Lailson 1990;

(outside the export sector), are forced to bear the brunt of rising costs of basic foodstuffs. This shift in priority away from urban consumers to rural producers is also thought likely to stem rural-urban migration (Demery *et al* 1993:3-4, although see also Afshar and Dennis 1992; Asthana 1994 for alternative commentaries).

²⁴ Caroline Moser (1989 and 1992) actually describes the social reproduction role as that of 'community maintenance/management'. Other authors, notably Frances Stewart (1992:21-5), have separated women's roles into four different components by splitting the domestic category into two. Stewart's definitions are thus: women as producers, women as managers of household consumption, women as mothers and carers, and women as participants in community welfare.

Massiah 1989; Rodríguez 1993). Women, on the other hand, have not only expanded their roles in remunerated labour, but have done so at a time when their conventional unpaid responsibilities have also become heavier (Asthana 1994:61-2). For example, rising costs of consumption mean that women usually have to inject even greater effort into housework than previously. This may involve spending more time planning meals, making more frequent trips to buy food and other items in small quantities as circumstances permit, and/or cultivating or elaborating goods such as foodstuffs and clothing that would normally be purchased in the market (see Afshar and Dennis 1992; Benería 1991; González de la Rocha 1988 and 1991a; Rodríguez 1993; Vickers 1991; Woodward 1993). Another factor is that increases in household membership may put greater strain on some women (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 1995:74). It is also important to bear in mind that in many poor urban neighbourhoods, the inadequacies in services and infrastructure which are likely to persist in a climate of limited public spending, are associated with additional pressures on women, whose domestic responsibilities have to embrace the prevention of ill-health and accidents associated with contaminated water supplies, insanitary sewerage and rubbish disposal, and unsafe physical environments which require the close monitoring of children (see Chant 1984; Dankelman and Davidson 1988).

Cutbacks in public expenditure on health and education push further weight onto the shoulders of the private sector, with women being especially affected by the introduction or raising of user charges, whether as consumers of social services or as actors/agents in community welfare. For example, Pamela Sparr (1994b:27) notes on the basis of United Nations data, that from 1980 onwards there has been a slow-down in the rate of improvement in male-female enrolment ratios in secondary education in Africa and Asia (see also Baden 1992:14 and 1993:7). Women may also receive less medical attention, which is serious when falling incomes can mean lower nutritional intake for women and increased susceptibility to infectious diseases and/or ill-health associated with pregnancy and childbirth (see Asthana 1994:57). At the same time, women may also bear a disproportionate load of caring for sick individuals within the household (Baden 1992:13; Browner 1989). On top of this, some studies indicate that urban women have suffered greater personal stress and violence as a result of recession and adjustment, either because they have been in a position of having to negotiate greater sums of money from their spouses (Moser 1992) or because their own workforce

participation has caused conflict with partners traditionally in the position of being the major or only breadwinners in the household (see de Barbieri and de Oliveira 1989; González de la Rocha 1991b). Women may also have to work harder to maintain or intensify networks with kin or neighbours where these provide vital sources of food, clothing, economic support, and/or job information (see de Barbieri and de Oliveira 1989:21; Blumberg 1991:107-8; Rodríguez 1993; although see also Willis 1993). In many respects, therefore, it is not difficult to see why many authors have argued that women in urban areas have borne the brunt of hardships associated with survival strategies under austerity in the 1980s and 1990s (see Afshar and Dennis 1992:3; Blumberg 1995:10; Sparr 1994b).

Having said this, and as indicated in as the previous section on household structure, gender aspects of household organization and livelihood often vary according to composition and headship, and in some contexts, household extension itself has been a survival strategy, with positive effects not only on household incomes, but also from the point of view of women within the household. In some circumstances, for example, the incorporation of kin has spared daughters the onus of assuming the tasks left by working mothers, and/or has increased women's labour market flexibility and enhanced their decision-making capacity. Another pattern, although again by no means universal, has been the increased formation of female-headed households. While this has often (and perhaps preponderantly) been viewed as a 'negative' outcome of economic crisis with women being 'abandoned' by men through labour migration or because of marital conflict resulting from financial duress (see below), it has also been argued that the gender inequities crystallized by recession and adjustment can provoke women to leave men who make little contribution to household survival (see Benería 1991:177-8). When women decide to set-up their own homes, this may, in some cases, be deemed a positive and empowering step, especially if in the process of so doing they are able to further their personal interests and the well-being of their dependants. In turn, this illustrates the relevance of gender within the context of shifts both in household structure and household survival strategies during urbanization, since women in town and cities are usually better placed than their rural counterparts to determine their own actions. This arises mainly because of the individualized nature of urban employment and the fact that women are freer to operate independently than in situations where land and the means of livelihood are held by corporate patriarchal entities (whether households or kin groups), as is so

often the case in rural areas (see Bradshaw 1995a; Chant 1985b and 1991a; Kabeer 1994:127; Momsen 1991:26). Indeed, a closer look at the linkages among household headship, household survival and poverty not only indicates the importance of detailed analyses of intra-household survival and poverty not only indicates the importance of detailed analyses of intra-household dynamics in exploring the social and economic corollaries of urbanization in different contexts, but, again, stresses the problems of making assumption-based generalizations about gender in urban environments.

4.1. Household survival, headship and poverty

Although a popular conventional wisdom about female-headed households is that they are the 'poorest of the poor' and are an archetypal expression of the late 20th century 'feminization of poverty' in developing countries (see Brodie 1994:49; Buvinic *et al.* 1992; Moghadam 1995a:122; Standing 1989:1093; Tinker 1990:5), a range of studies, particularly of urban areas, indicate that poverty is not necessarily a cause or feature of female headship. Bearing in mind the difficulties of assessing in any direct fashion whether economic restructuring has led to increased impoverishment among women, or a rise in female headship, let alone whether these two phenomena are intrinsically linked (Sparr 1994b), the kinds of factors normally cited as giving rise to female household headship under economic crisis include the fact that men's loss of employment or quality of employment prompts them to migrate elsewhere to find work, with the fragmentation of family units often causing discord and increasing the propensity to marital breakdown (see Bullock 1994:17; Cleves Mosse 1993:45; Shanthi 1994:19). Another factor conceivably exacerbating the prospects of marital dissolution is stress, or loss of self-esteem among men in societies when they become unable to fulfil their socially-expected role of breadwinner (see for example, Boyden and Holden 1991:19-20; Stichter 1990:53). This may be especially marked where wives are working (see de Barbieri and de Oliveira 1989:26; González de la Rocha 1991b). A further factor seen as accounting for increases in female household headship is that in the event that women are abandoned or widowed, greater all-round poverty may make it more difficult for relatives to take them in, as has often traditionally been the case in many South Asian and North African countries (see Drèze 1990 on India; Pryer 1992:141 on Bangladesh; Youssef and Hetler 1983 on Morocco).

While increased poverty and unemployment have been seen as giving rise to female headship, female headship, in turn, is seen to exacerbate poverty. Indeed, even if the dearth of gender-disaggregated macro-level income and poverty data make it hard to draw definitive conclusions, several authors have emphasized that women-headed households are a disproportionate number of the poor in developing societies (see Bullock 1994:17-18; Folbre 1991; INSTRAW 1992:237; Pollack 1989; Standing 1989:1093; Staudt 1991:63). This has been linked to the idea that women-headed households (especially lone mother units) are doubly disadvantaged, both by having fewer wage earners than two-parent households, and because women's inferior status in the labour market and the difficulties of reconciling employment and childcare results in confinement to part-time, informal jobs with low-earnings and few or non-existent fringe benefits (Browner 1989:467; Buvinic *et al* 1992; Elson 1989:68; Haddad 1991; Safa and Antrobus 1992:54).

Yet various micro- and macro-level studies have questioned whether female household headship and poverty are as closely linked as they are so often portrayed. For example, Eileen Kennedy (1994:35-6) notes on the basis of World Bank data, that while female-headed households are likely to be over-represented among the poor in Asia and Latin America, this is less so in Africa. A closer look at intra-regional patterns qualifies even this observation. For example, within Central America, only Nicaragua and El Salvador have higher levels of female headship among the poor than the national average, notwithstanding that two-thirds to three-quarters of the population of all six nations making-up the region are classified as poor (Menjívar and Trejos 1992).²⁵ Beyond this, a variety of nationally- or city-based studies have indicated that women-headed households are found at all levels of the socio-economic spectrum and are by no means disproportionately represented among low-income groups (see Hackenberg *et al* 1981 on the Philippines; Kumari 1989:31 on India, and Weekes-Vagliani 1992:142 on the Côte d'Ivoire).

²⁵ The specific criteria for measuring poverty vary from country to country. However, broadly speaking, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama and Guatemala rely on the 'poverty line', which is based on income and defines the poor as those who are unable to afford a 'basic basket' of foodstuffs. Nicaragua and Honduras, on the other hand, use a 'basic needs' assessment, where poverty is equated with the non-satisfaction of necessities that extended beyond food to include access to basic goods and services as well (see Menjívar and Trejos 1992:55-6).

Micro-level studies, particularly of urban areas, have been instrumental in revealing the kinds of reasons why female-headed households are not always poorer than male-headed households in the same social strata or neighbourhood and indicate the importance of looking in detail at household survival strategies. One of the critical points is that the labour market status of female household heads (inferior as it might be) does not provide an automatic indicator of household welfare (Chant 1985b; see also Evans 1992). This is often because women-headed households have multiple earners, drawn either from their own offspring or from kin within their households (Chant 1985a and 1985b; González de la Rocha 1994:16).²⁶ While male-headed households may also have more than one earner, relative to household size they may have fewer than women-headed units due to sub-optimal use of their labour supply. Despite economic crisis in Mexico, for example, men in various cities may still forbid their wives and daughters to work, especially in jobs outside the home (Benería and Roldan 1987:146; Chant 1985a; Fernández-Kelly 1983; Willis 1993:71; see also Stichter 1990:60). Notwithstanding that women-headed households may need more workers because women's earnings are lower than men's, the result is that dependency burdens (i.e. numbers of non-earners per worker) are often lower and per capita incomes higher in female-headed units (see Chant 1991a:204; Selby *et al.* 1990:95; Varley 1996; although see also Buvinic and Gupta 1993:4).

Another factor critically important in the analysis of household headship, survival and poverty is what is actually done with earnings in male- and female-headed units. In the former, for example, it has often been observed that male breadwinners do not contribute all their wage to household needs, but retain varying proportions (sometimes up to 50 per cent - see González de la Rocha 1994:10) for expenditure on items or activities for personal use/recreation including alcohol, gambling, tobacco and extra-marital affairs (see Benería and Roldan 1987:114; Chant 1985a and 1985b; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Dwyer and Bruce 1988; Kabeer 1994:104; Thorbek 1987:111). In addition, male heads may command a greater share of resources (due to their superior bargaining power) than they actually bring to the household, thereby representing a net drain on household

²⁶ Although in some countries such as Egypt, female heads of household may have to resort to using child labour (see Moghadam 1995c:3), in other contexts, such as Mexico, most women heads in urban areas tend to be at a stage in the life cycle where some of their children are adolescents or young adults who have already completed their education, and these are the household members who go out to work (Chant 1985b).

income (Folbre 1991:108). Women, on the other hand, tend to be more household-oriented in their use of wages, with the overall result that female heads of household (who are more likely to be employed than women in male-headed units) are not necessarily the 'poorest of the poor', just as 'being a member of a male-headed household does not guarantee high levels of well-being for women and children (González de la Rocha 1994:9-10; also Chant 1985b and 1991; Visaria and Visaria 1985:63). Beyond this, expenditure is often more often biased towards nutrition and education (as opposed to 'non-merit' goods) in female-headed households (Appleton 1991; Chant 1985b; Engle 1995; Hoddinott and Haddad 1991; Kanji 1991; Kennedy 1994:36-7; Weekes-Vagliani 1992:138), and there may be fewer inequalities between sons and daughters in terms of access to food, schooling and other resources (Blumberg 1995:7; González de la Rocha 1994:20). In short, just as shifts in household structure during urbanization cannot be generalized, nor can the survival strategies and welfare outcomes of particular types of urban household units. The fact is that female-headed households may not turn out to be poorer than male-headed structures when the analysis of intra-household factors such as per capita earnings, intra-household resource distribution, expenditure patterns and so on are taken into account. This, in turn, indicates the importance of exercising caution in respect of abstracting gender from its household context. Indeed, blanket assumptions about the poverty of female-headed households are not only often inaccurate, but run the danger of obscuring the fact that women may suffer to an even greater degree as members of male-headed structures. As Sibongile Muthwa (1993:8) has noted for the township of Soweto, South Africa:

.... within the household, there is much exploitation of women by men which goes unnoticed when we use poverty measures which simply treat households as units and ignore intra-household aspects of exploitation. When we measure poverty, for example, we need measures which illuminate unequal access to resources between men and women in the household.

Having said this, there is no doubt that female household heads are often at the sharp end of gender discrimination in many other aspects of urban life, with one problem posing major difficulties for women on their own or with children being that of shelter. Female heads of household are frequently noted as being denied access to formal housing schemes (usually on account of low and irregular earnings), and even in the case of incremental

self-build shelter projects are sometimes deemed ineligible because they are assumed not to have the time, resources and/or skills to construct dwellings as rapidly or to the same standards as their male counterparts (see Moser 1987:25-8; also Machado 1987; Momsen 1991:100-1; Rasanayagam 1993:145). Such assumptions are dangerous, not only because women in self-help settlements often do build homes of an equal or better quality than men by investing larger proportions of their earnings (see Chant 1987 on Mexico; Larsson 1989 on Botswana), and because women with young children may need such housing (which generally offers the prospect of owner-occupancy) as a basis for income-generating activities (Nimpuno-Parente 1987; Sherriff 1991), but also because lack of independent access to shelter restricts women's freedom to dictate the forms that their households might take. As Ann Schlyter (1989:180) has argued, housing is 'essential in the strategy of household formation', and as Anita Larsson (1989:111-2) notes, 'a dwelling of one's own is important not only for unmarried women's survival in town, but also for supporting their identity as independent women and when fulfilling their roles as mothers' (see also Chant and Ward 1987).

Other major problems for women-headed households in urban areas arise from the deficiencies or absence of services and infrastructure in low-income communities. As noted earlier, inadequacies in sewerage disposal, rubbish collection, water supplies and so on add time and pressure to domestic labour. This may be compounded by transport systems which are rarely designed with the needs of women with multiple responsibilities in mind (see Levy 1992; Moser 1993:53-4). Although such problems clearly affect all women, as Caren Levy (1992:97) notes '... in the case of female-headed households, the burden of the triple role is exacerbated'. Moreover, the virtual total absence of subsidized childcare facilities in third world cities makes it difficult for particular groups of female heads such as lone mothers with young children to reconcile employment with reproductive responsibilities, which brings us to look a little more closely at gender aspects of urban employment in the last two decades.

V GENDER ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT IN URBAN AREAS: RECENT TRENDS

Although Sally Baden (1993:3) points out that 'no general conclusions have been drawn about the employment effects of recession and

adjustment', urban employment in many parts of the developing world seems to have been hard-hit by economic restructuring. Prominent changes in urban labour markets have been reduced rates of job creation in the formal sector, retrenchments in both public and private institutions/firms, the growth of informal activities and the informalization of employment within formal sector enterprises, losses in real wages, declining labour protection, and rising rates of open unemployment (see Elson 1991; Gilbert 1994; Portes 1989; Rodgers 1989; Standing and Tokman [eds] 1991). These changes have taken place in varying degrees in different countries and their effects on men and women have also been variable (see for example Moghadam 1995a). If anything, however, there is more (albeit often contradictory) evidence to suggest that women have borne the brunt of negative trends in labour market evolution, even if their economic activity has risen in many urban areas (and at national levels) over the last 15-20 years, and led some authors to view this, combined with their entry into new jobs (especially in export industries), as constituting a 'global feminization of labour' (Standing 1989; see also Joeke 1987:18; Moghadam 1994). The fact is, however, that women who have entered the workforce during the era of economic restructuring have done so at a time when employment conditions have deteriorated, and as Valentine Moghadam (1995b:18) has pointed out:

... the impact of restructuring on women ranges from retrenchment and mass unemployment to job opportunities in 'flexible' labour markets, which include subcontracting and the revival of homework and domestic and family labour systems. Such forms of unstable employment are characterized by low wages and the absence of social security (see also Chant 1994b; Moghadam 1995a).

Although in some countries such as Mexico and the Philippines, women now represent a significant proportion of the manufacturing workforce (see for example Alba Vega and Roberts 1990:480; Chant and McIlwaine 1995), this is mainly because of the recruitment of women into labour-intensive multinational companies whose primary aim is to maintain global competitiveness through minimizing wage costs.²⁷ In increasing numbers of cases, such firms are also sub-contracting parts of the production

²⁷ As of 1990, women were 28.4 per cent of the manufacturing labour force in Mexico (ILO 1992:10), and 46 per cent in the Philippines (ibid: 94).

process out of their factories to drive the wage bill lower still. As Rae Lesser Blumberg (1995:3) asserts:

Corporations search the globe for the most advantageous place to produce products, or buy inputs, or declare earnings from transactions. Flexible labour means burgeoning informal sectors in most of the world, rising ranks of temporary contract employees, and an intricate web of sub-contracting that extends, for example, from poor Third World women working in their homes to slightly less poor ones working in export-processing zone (EPZ) factories.

These observations are echoed by Valentine Moghadam (1995b:21) who views a major outcome of global restructuring as the growth of the number of informal female industrial workers based at home or in small-scale workshops or factories, who receive low pay and have unregulated working conditions (see also Benería and Roldan 1987; Peña Saint Martin and Gamboa Cetina 1991). Although women's presence in industrial work is growing, levels of open unemployment are usually higher among women than men, and for the most part the tertiary sector (principally commerce and services) continues to absorb the bulk of female labour in third world cities. It is also significant that many of women's tertiary activities (as with those in manufacturing) are concentrated in the informal sector which has suffered in various ways from labour market decline during recession and restructuring. Although in many urban areas the informal sector has expanded during the last decade or so, the fact is that this is often because of losses or reduced opportunities in private and public formal sector employment and/or because people have had to try and find ways of supplementing their earnings from existing jobs. The result has been increased competition at a time when the market for goods and services traded by informal workers has contracted because of lower purchasing power among the population in general (see Elson 1991:48; Kanji *et al* 1991:990; Stewart 1992:26). For women, these difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that, compared with men, they usually have fewer financial resources or assets with which to start-up or operate small-scale businesses, their skills are primarily domestic which confines them to lower profit ventures, and they may also have to remain based at home or in the immediate neighbourhood because of household responsibilities or social and community constraints on their freedom of movement (Brydon and Chant 1989: 176-7; Lessinger 1990; Vera-Sanso 1995). In some urban localities, particularly those which are small and have limited markets, the

returns to women's labour may be so low as to discourage them from participating in income-generating activities at all. For example, in the towns of Guanacaste in north-west Costa Rica, where much of the male population work in agriculture in the rural hinterlands and where there is limited urban-based economic activity, particularly of a formal nature, women in low-income communities often end-up selling the same goods as their neighbours (principally foodstuffs). Because they do not have the skills or resources to diversify, and because they are unable to leave their children and travel further afield to enhance their profits, some give-up their trade and others do not embark on one in the first place (Chant 1994a:97). This is often referred to as the 'discouraged worker' effect (Baden 1993:13). In other contexts, competition may still be marked, but if cities and markets are larger and greater numbers of men and women are working in other sectors such as manufacturing, it may be possible to engage in a range of informal activities at one time in order to make ends meet. In industrial cities in the Philippine Visayas such as Cebu and Lapu-Lapu, for example, low-income women may not only hold a salaried job, but undertake a number of 'sidelines' such as renting-out rooms, selling beauty products and services, providing catering facilities for full-time factory workers and/or making items such as toys and clothes for sale in their communities (see Chant and McIlwaine 1995). Indeed, in international Philippine tourism resorts such as Boracay, the opportunities to make money from informal activities such as beach-vending, snack stalls, *sari-sari* stores (grocery outlets/general stores) and the production and retail of craft items and souvenirs are such that informal workers may earn more than formal sector employees in hotels, restaurants and registered commercial establishments (ibid). Yet while it is important to acknowledge that the relative benefits from informal sector work may vary from place to place, it is still usually the case that men earn more. In Boracay, for instance, male informal workers tend to be involved in activities with higher profit margins than their female counterparts, such as transport, and the sale of goods with more guaranteed daily markets such as fish, newspapers and ice cream (as opposed to crafts, manicures, massages and so on) (ibid).

Despite the comparatively limited rewards women may reap from income-generating activities in urban areas, their labour force participation, as mentioned earlier, has risen in most developing regions (with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa) since the 1970s (UN 1991:83). In Mexico, for example, women's share of total employment increased from 24.2 per cent

to 30.1 per cent between 1977 and 1991, in the Philippines it rose from 30.1 per cent to 37.7 per cent between 1977 and 1992, and in Costa Rica it climbed from 24.3 per cent to 29.5 per cent between 1980 and 1992 (Chant 1997:121, Table 5:4). The profile of female workers has also changed, with older married women becoming as, if not more active, than young single females. For example, while only 10 per cent of married women in Mexico were recorded as participating in the labour force in 1970, this had risen to 25.6 per cent by 1991 (CEPAL 1994:15). Indeed the age cohort of Mexican women with the highest economic activity rate is currently (in 1990) 35-39 years (compared with 20-24 years in 1980), which is a stage in the life-cycle when most have major family responsibilities.²⁸ While various demand and supply factors have led to the rising entry of women into the labour force such as increased demand for female labour in multinational factories, the expansion of tertiary activities, rising levels of female education, lower fertility and so on, not to mention that women's workforce participation was on the increase in many parts of the world prior to recession (see for example, Gilbert 1994:73; Moghadam 1995b:29; Monteón 1995:50; Scott 1994), among low-income groups in urban areas, it seems that the need to protect household incomes during economic crisis have provided the major impetus to women taking jobs (see for example, Chant 1991a; Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Cleves Mosse 1993:122-3; Gindling 1993:291; Santos and Lee 1989; Tiano 1990:216-7).²⁹ This is important because it indicates the embeddedness of gender inequalities within households (and more particularly, how women's activities are first and foremost dictated by patriarchal norms of putting household and family before self). In turn, this raises questions as to whether major shifts in gender roles and relations arising from urban economic change can occur when female labour force participation has, in many cases, not been borne of personal decisions, is still largely secondary to domestic and childcare responsibilities, and in some instances may merely become a means by which men are able to further their own interests at the expense of other household members. In the Philippine Visayas, for example, where urban women are increasingly involved in employment in export-oriented sector such as manufacturing and international tourism, household needs are deemed their principal rationale

²⁸ As of 1990, 43 per cent of 35-39 year-old women in Mexico were recorded as having employment as against only 31 per cent in 1980 (CEPAL 1994:15).

²⁹ The process whereby the supply of female labour increases in the face of pressures on household income exerted by the fall in men's real wages and employment is often referred to as the 'added worker' effect (see Baden 1993:13).

for working, yet female earnings do not necessarily end-up enhancing collective well-being but are diverted to husbands' personal expenditures instead (Chant and McIlwaine 1995:299). As Michael Monteón (1995:43) observes more generally:

Economic crises usually have compounded problems and accelerated trends that were already in progress. In such crises, most women have probably been torn between social norms based on the patriarchal ideal and the need to work outside the household on extremely unfavourable terms. But if women enter the workforce on terms decided by others, whether these others are men or multinational corporations, and if gender reflects the more general pattern of power relations in society, then women's prospects in any crisis turn on the extent to which poser itself is being redefined.

Although modifications in power relations at domestic and societal levels arising from female labour force participation may seem scant in any major sense, as with changes in household structure associated with urbanization (particularly increased female headship), impacts on the lives of individual women may be fairly pronounced and the seeds of change may well be sown for alternative futures (see footnote 7). For example, women's growing roles as independent wage-earners in urban and urbanizing areas of the Philippine Visayas have begun to alter the nature of their relationships with housework and childcare, with full-time female workers usually in the position of sharing these responsibilities with other individuals within and/or beyond the household. In the case of single women, postponing marriage, taking a more decisive stance towards choice of husbands, and playing a greater part in determining their prospective fertility seem to be more common amongst women in full-time work in the export sector, which continues to expand in the wake of economic restructuring (Chant and McIlwaine 1995:299-300; see also Moghadam 1995a:131). Whether or not these changes will gather sufficient momentum to extend beyond the boundaries of the domestic domain and make themselves felt in any wider sense remains to be seen, however. As Michael Monteón (1995:55) has questioned: 'How can anyone be expected to work long hours at low wages, look after an impoverished household, and also organize politically?' Indeed, if gender inequalities in urban labour markets, or in any other sphere of urban life, are to diminish in any substantial measure, then back-up from organized

pressure groups, NGOs, national governments and international agencies is arguably a vital part of this process.

VI CONCLUDING COMMENTS: GENDERED URBANIZATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The main arguments of this study have been that urbanization and its outcomes are highly gendered; that the gendering of urbanization is highly variable between places (depending upon class, culture, economic conditions and so on); that it is difficult to consider gender aspects of urban growth and development without reference to household circumstances (and particularly intra-household dynamics); that the analysis of gender, household structures and household survival strategies has become even more important in recent times in the context of economic restructuring (for diagnoses of poverty and for policy purposes), and that detailed micro-level studies of gender, households and employment in urban areas are vital to dispense with assumptions that often give rise to inappropriate generalizations. Yet what these issues mean in a policy context, and how they translate into specific urban policies is complex. Although urbanization is gendered in all parts of the developing world, variability in patterns and outcomes in different countries makes it difficult to identify particular ways in which policy interventions might diminish gender inequalities in urban environments everywhere. Besides this, it is also important to note that unless gender inequalities are attenuated in rural settings, then there is probably little scope to effect major, let alone radical, improvement in existing disparities. For this reason, it is problematic to pinpoint policies specific to urban areas that would provide anything other than cosmetic solutions to the problems faced by disadvantaged groups (see also Wratten 1995 for parallel arguments concerning the reduction of urban poverty). Accordingly, suggestions need to be couched within a more general remit. One point relating to urbanization *per se*, however, is the need not only to recognize that this is gendered but that analysis of the phenomenon for research and policy purposes needs something of an overhaul, particularly in respect of diminishing the degree of tokenism with which it tends to be characterized at present. As Caroline Moser (1995) has argued:

... as long as research on women remains an 'add-on', the results remain outside of mainstream urban policy and fail to influence

important policy agendas... For many researchers the first priority for the 1990s is the mainstreaming of what is still a separate specialist concern, and its translation into policy and practice.

Another major issue is to determine the priorities by which urban research and policies concerning gender should be guided. Although not specific to urban areas, the 1980s and 1990s have seen the growth in acknowledgement, both by national and international bodies, of women's contributions to development, with structural adjustment having highlighted the ways in which women's paid and unpaid labour is vital to household and community welfare. Regrettably, this has tended to lead to policies (usually grouped under the heading of the 'efficiency approach'), which incorporate women in development in such a way as to further the interests of national economies, but with little concern to empower women themselves (see Moser 1989b and 1993:69-73; see also Blumberg 1995:10; Elson 1989 and 1991; Sparr 1994c). As Cecilia Andersen (1992:174) has summed-up:

Women are seen as an underused asset for development: It is assumed that their increased economic activity will - in and of itself - lead to increased equity. In the efficiency approach women's unpaid time is used as self-help components in economic activities, specifically with respect to human resource development and for the management of community problems. It assumes that women's unpaid labour in areas such as childcare, fuel-gathering, food processing, preparation of meals, nursing the sick etc., is elastic.

Clearly, these kinds of assumptions translate into policies and programmes which do little to benefit women and, if anything, merely serve to reinforce and exacerbate the already onerous gamut of activities for which women are responsible. For this reason, notions of empowering women through increasing control over their own lives and by enlarging their choices would be more appropriate, with due regard being given to the formulation of priorities by women in developing countries over and above those of governments and/or international agencies (Andersen 1992:174; Moser 1993:74-9).³⁰ In urban contexts, an appropriate starting point might be extensive consultation with women on their short- and long-term needs for housing, employment, neighbourhood infrastructure, urban services and so

³⁰ This is usually referred to the 'empowerment approach' (see Moser 1993:74).

on. In conjunction with acknowledging women's voices, channels should be created by which these might work up the various tiers of the development planning hierarchy (perhaps through NGOs), and efforts made to ensure that women's contributions to the economic and social life of cities are recognized, assisted and duly rewarded.

Another critical issue for policy is recognizing diversity, not only in terms of patterns of urban growth in different societies, but in terms of different groups of women (and men). While the present discussion has concentrated primarily on household-based diversity in urban areas, other axes of differentiation such as ethnicity, stage in the life course, class and so on, are also vitally important (see McIlwaine 1995; Scott 1994). Since women and men are not only different from each other, but in themselves form highly heterogeneous groups, this means that policies geared to alleviating disadvantage must be free of *a priori* and/or generalized assumptions, and explore more rigorously which particular groups (e.g. female household heads, ethnic minority women, elderly men and/or women) are in greatest need in different spheres of urban development such as transport, housing, employment and community welfare. Such initiatives will, at the bottom line, require flexibility in targeting beneficiaries. In respect of housing, for example, policy-makers need to take on board that nuclear families are by no means the only type of household unit in urban areas and care must be taken to ensure that alternative domestic arrangements are catered for in shelter programmes (see for example, Chant and Ward 1987; Pothukuchi 1993). Beyond this, it may be that some kind of affirmative action (if not positive discrimination) is necessary to acknowledge and bolster the efforts made by those individuals in urban areas who are making the greatest effort on behalf of their households. In the sphere of employment, for example, assumptions about women being 'secondary' earners are less and less relevant as time goes on. While the protection of labour and hard-won male gains of 'family wages' and so on are fast eroding as economies restructure along neo-liberal lines, some commitment should be made to social policies and labour codes that 'acknowledge, value and facilitate' women's participation in the workforce, whether in the formal or informal sector (Moghadam 1995a:132). Women's multiplicity of responsibilities in urban areas should be further compensated by supportive infrastructure and services such as cheap and affordable childcare facilities. Beyond this, and in the event that states are unable or unwilling to find the full complement of resources necessary to assist people disadvantaged on account of their gender (and

class), they may also have to take a stronger line in domains traditionally considered as 'private'. Although improved wage rates for women and better systems of childcare might be one answer, another is to attempt to increase paternal responsibilities and change men's spending priorities so that a greater proportion of their income is directed to children's basic needs, whether they reside in women's households or not (Engle 1995:155-6; see also Bruce and Lloyd 1992; Folbre 1994). Although, as we have seen, female-headed households in urban areas often manage to cope with poverty by adopting survival strategies that make full use of labour supply and give precedence to the welfare of dependants, there is little justification to leave these households to their own devices when gender (and class) inequalities in the societies in which they live are responsible for presenting them with some of the biggest challenges they face in the first place. Again, such recommendations extend beyond urban boundaries and underline the importance of coordinated local, national and international efforts in the struggle to achieve greater parity between different social groups in urban areas.

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