

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO GENDER IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS? EXAMPLES FROM KWAZULU/NATAL

Alison Todes and Dori Posel

Introduction

After a decline in popularity, regional development has re-emerged as an important element of economic development policy. Regional development strategies, however, are being cast in a new mold, in which notions of 'bottom up' development, focusing on regional and local competitive advantage, have largely replaced an earlier emphasis on regional equalisation through 'top down' intervention. Although recent approaches to regional and local development vary, and there is considerable debate over the appropriate form of especially local development strategies (Roberts, 1989), the competitive regions model is increasingly gaining pre-eminence.

In the South African context, the creation of new political regions in terms of the 1993 constitution, and concomitant pressures towards devolution, have opened new space for regional development strategies. Over the past few years regional development fora have also been established in a number of areas. These fora emerged partly in response to regional economic decline, and provided an opportunity for previously excluded political and other groupings to influence development. Although the future of these fora has yet to be determined, they have provided some of the groundwork on which regional strategies are likely to be based.

Regional development strategies potentially are an important arena in which socio-economic policies may be forged. Despite the new significance of these strategies, and the commitment to redress gender inequalities at national level, gender considerations are not fully incorporated into policy thinking. This paper traces the discourse of regional development, noting its gender blindness, and, using work on regional development within KwaZulu/Natal as an example, it points to lacunae from a feminist perspective. The paper examines a recent report which draws together sectoral and spatial studies of the region, and which makes preliminary suggestions regarding strategy.¹ In this report, policy considerations are cast broadly within a competitive regions model, although more redistributive elements of a growth strategy also form part of the approach. The report

is analysed against the background of the growing feminisation of the labour force and the economic position of women in the region, as well as the experience of various development strategies within the region.

This examination does not attempt to offer an alternative set of policy recommendations. Rather, the KwaZulu/Natal report is used as one example to highlight gender-specific problems that may arise within regional strategising, and within the competitive regions approach more specifically. In the first section of the paper, the discourse of regional development and the basis for its gender blindness is traced. The second section outlines the main windows for conceptualising gender within regional development. The remainder of the analysis focuses on the KwaZulu/Natal report², examining in turn policy suggestions which arise from questions of growth and redistribution.

The Discourse of Regional Development

Approaches to regional development have shifted over time, but questions of economic growth, efficiency and place-based development have tended to be dominating themes in the way strategies are constructed. The origins of regional policy lay initially in concerns about unemployment in lagging areas or areas facing decline due to recession or economic restructuring before World War II. Regional policy, however, only became a significant concern of central governments in the 1960s, and was cast within the logic of national economic growth according to the dominant paradigm of the time (see Todes, 1993 for an elaboration). Apart from the social issues, regional economists argued that the development of peripheral areas and regional economic convergence were necessary from the perspective of national economic development (Armstrong and Taylor, 1982). This position was supported by spatial theorists who linked spatial balance to Rostow's stage of high mass consumption, and argued that the regional inequalities prevalent in developing countries could impede their development (Friedmann, 1966).

Regional policy therefore attempted to achieve spatial balance by containing growth in the metropolises, and by attempting to attract industry to lagging and depressed areas instead. Although the emphasis in theory was on creating dynamic 'growth poles' in economically peripheral places, the focus in practice was more often on attracting some industry to these areas. In stressing the development of places, and in the usually narrow concern with industry, social issues and the social impact of policy were often neglected. Gender issues were rarely considered, although ironically and contrary to expectations, jobs created were frequently low wage ones which were occupied by women.

In South Africa, industrial decentralisation policy, the main form of regional development, largely mimicked practice elsewhere, albeit with an apartheid

rationale. The apartheid basis of regional development was a key element of the critique of regional policy. But, as elsewhere, criticisms levelled at the ineffectiveness of the policy, and its tendency to emphasise spatial redistribution and place-based development at the expense of the development of people, were central to the decline of regional policy. In both South Africa and the international context, however, the rejection of regional policy was overlaid by a neo-liberal argument emphasising its inefficiency from the perspective of national economic growth. In a number of contexts, the shift towards monetarist policy, and the perception of regional policy as essentially welfarist, was critical to its decline in practice (Johnston, 1986).

After a period of dormancy, new approaches to regional development have emerged. This revival has built on the experience of local economic development (LED), initiated by local governments, in response to the place-specific effects of global economic restructuring and the decline of protective regional policy in the 1980s. In contrast to the past, new regional strategies focus on 'bottom up' development, emphasising both endogenous regional development and development which is initiated and shaped by local and regional agencies, rather than by central government. It is suggested also that strategies do not confine themselves simply to industry, but that they be multi-sectoral. In practice, industrial development is not ignored. But strategies seek to 'enhance and strengthen' (Bloch, 1993:38) existing industrial clusters, rather than attempting to attract only industry.

A significant new approach is the 'competitive regions' model, which, following Porter's (1990) work on national economic development, suggests that regional development strategies should focus on strengthening competitive advantage. Proponents argue that regions not only face an increasingly integrated world economy, forcing them to orient their production to international competition, but also that the role of nations and regions in developing competitive advantage should be stressed, since they 'are the source of skills and technology that underpin competitive advantage' (Porter, 1990:72, cited in SSMB/DRA, 1993:9).

Like the earlier literature, the competitive regions model emphasises place-based growth, but argues that it should be achieved through different means. More successful areas, and especially significant agglomerations or clusters of particular industries, are emphasised, as these are believed to be key to the development of competitive advantage (Bloch, 1993). Linked to this position, some authors argue that in the context of globalisation, which is weakening national governments, regions and localities are becoming more important spheres for developing competitive advantage (eg Harris, 1991). The world cities hypothesis (Friedmann, 1986), for example, suggests that the global economy is

dominated by a network of cities, which link increasingly to one another, rather than to their national economies. Integration within the European Economic Community is expected to lead to the weakening of national governments, and a growing number of cities and regions are positioning themselves as major players in economic development. Taken to an extreme, the competitive regions approach argues that cities and regions, and not nations, compete, and that local and regional strategies should assist them in doing so. A more limited view would stress the role of regional and local economic development strategies in improving national competitive advantage (Bloch, 1993).

In South Africa, the Urban Foundation's statement on regional development (1990) and the Development Bank of Southern Africa's preferred approach to regional development (1989) can be seen as precursors to the new competitive regionalism. These documents argue for a multi-sectoral approach to regional development, according to the region's comparative advantage³. Their focus is on the metropolitan areas, which are seen as offering the greatest potential for growth, as well as on economic activities where regional strengths exist or may be promoted. A more developed version of the competitive regions approach is evident in current regional debates, and is certainly present within the discourse of the SSMB/DRA Synthesis Report.

Feminist concerns are notably absent in the literature on competitive regions. This silence perhaps is not surprising in the emphasis on place-based economic competition, an emphasis which may downplay broader social concerns. While the discourse of regional development therefore has changed, its failure to consider gender remains.

Gender in Regional Development

As noted above, the question of gender in relation to regional development has largely been ignored. Several writers have noted the gendered impact of past regional policies, and primarily that of industrial decentralisation (Bagguley et al. 1990; Massey, 1984; Pudifin and Ward, 1986; Jaffe, 1988). Yet, in much of the international and the South African literature on recent regional development strategies, there is little work which examines how gender dynamics and problems may be incorporated within regional development programmes.

The literature on gender and economic policy, and on gender and development more generally, however, does provide a number of clear pointers to the issues which need to be considered. Perhaps the most obvious, but often unrecognised, aspect is the extent to which 'gender bias' operates in regional economic policy, particularly through what jobs and incomes are created and for whom. Occupational segregation by gender, in other words, sex-specific access to certain job types, remuneration and working conditions, reflects gender relations more

broadly. Although women's employment internationally has increased significantly, it has not risen proportionately in all sectors and in all kinds of employment. Rather women have been crowded into specific sectors, and within sectors, into certain kinds of jobs which tend to be low-paying, and which usually are classified as less skilled forms of work. In this regard, Ginwala et al point to the 'eternal dilemma' (1991:5) of the need to improve conditions for women where they are, and also to challenge the sexual division of labour which confines women to certain occupations and activities, and men to others.

A critical aspect of both improving existing conditions for women, as well as challenging the sexual division of labour and gender relations more generally, concerns the question of unpaid labour. Feminist theorists argue that women's responsibility for reproduction, that is, for the usually unpaid work of producing and maintaining children, domestic labour, and caring for the sick and aged, plays a significant role in their subordination. Like many feminists, Vogel (1983) for example, argues that responsibility for reproduction and the conditions under which it occurs, shapes the way women are able to participate in remunerated work. Furthermore, assumptions that women are responsible for reproduction, and therefore will have discontinuous and unstable work experience, are often used to justify discriminatory practices in the workplace.

Women's responsibility for reproduction, and the way this affects their socio-economic status, is not generally recognised in economic policy thinking. Reproductive tasks are critical to the survival of households and, more broadly, to society. Without both biological and social reproduction, paid work would not be possible. Yet although the work they do is not dissimilar to much of the work included in the formal economy, women engaged solely in unpaid reproductive tasks are classified as 'not economically active'.

At a practical level, the poor level of social and physical infrastructure in developing countries greatly extends the amount of time involved in unpaid labour. Although the impact of additional work imposed by poor infrastructure is mediated within households, the scope for this mediation is limited by gender constraints, and assumptions around women's 'natural' roles and responsibilities. It is therefore almost always women who undertake the extra labour associated with inadequate infrastructure. In larger households, this burden can be shared between women albeit not without costs. For example, because of their domestic responsibilities, the schoolwork of daughters may suffer. But in smaller nuclear households, as Todes and Walker (1992) found in their study of different settlement types in Durban, the classic 'double burden' on women is likely to operate most clearly.

Unpaid labour, and the ways in which economic policy may respond to it, is increasingly seen as a critical area by feminists (Elson, 1993), but it is rarely

considered within regional development strategies. While infrastructure is often an important aspect of these strategies, the focus is frequently on the needs of business. From a feminist perspective, infrastructure for social reproduction and the way it is provided are crucial considerations.

The relationship between the position of women in the economy and the responsibility for reproduction is mutually reinforcing. As noted earlier, the discounting of women's unpaid labour in the home has adverse effects on their participation in paid work. On the other hand, women's position in the labour force, and their lower incomes, affect their access to those resources (such as housing, childcare, water, energy) which facilitate the process of social reproduction. For example, in Durban, very few women have been able to buy developer-built housing in their own right (Todes and Walker, 1992), and women-headed households are over-represented in the more peripheral informal settlements with the worst services (Hindson, 1994).

In evaluating regional development policy from a feminist perspective, a further set of issues therefore concerns women's access to and control over resources. There is also the question of what kinds of benefits are made available. Feminist development analysts (eg see Moser, 1989) argue that priorities for men and women may differ due to their gender specific roles. Ginwala et al (1991) consequently note that women's participation in decision-making processes and resource allocation is critical to overcome possible gender bias and to ensure that women, as well as men, are empowered in the development process.

Policies which assume undifferentiated communities and households do not necessarily reflect women's concerns because they ignore gender relations. The assumption that households are a single maximising unit, for example, has been extensively questioned by feminist theorists who point to gender power inequalities which affect intra-household distribution (Elson, 1993; Kabeer, 1991; Rakodi, 1993). These points not only influence the implementation of policy, but also have a bearing on the way in which regional development strategies are formulated.

Responding to women's unpaid labour, however, is not only a question of infrastructure provision. A broader question concerns the way in which the sexual division of labour may be challenged, and particularly the view that unpaid labour is 'exclusively' and 'naturally' women's preserve. Certainly regional development policy is not the only mechanism through which this problem can be addressed. Nevertheless it is important that more attention be paid to the gender implications of those unwritten assumptions which often form the basis of regional strategy.

Gender and Regional Development Strategy in KwaZulu/Natal

The project on regional development strategies in KwaZulu/Natal was developed parallel to the creation of the Regional Economic Forum. Although the two processes initially were unlinked, results from the regional project were later fed into the forum. The documents as a whole therefore are likely to be influential in future policy, particularly since limited regional analysis existed previously.

The project was broadly cast in terms of a competitive regions approach. The Synthesis Report reflects this emphasis in the argument that:

In the long run the aim must be to enhance the competitive position of the region, make best use of the existing comparative advantages, and develop new competitive advantages in line with international trends (SSMB/DRA, 1993:3)

Nevertheless, it was suggested that redistribution was also essential, as 'without redistribution the economy will exist in a highly unstable climate' (SSMB/DRA, 1993:3). Both externally oriented growth aimed at enabling manufacturing to compete internationally, and inward oriented growth were seen as necessary, as even 'successful export promotion... would be unable to mop up unemployment sufficiently to mop up the massive surplus of labour' (SSMB/DRA, 1993:3).

In line with strategic planning methodology, sectoral reports examining the external and internal environment were commissioned, and these were supplemented by papers on the various subregions. The importance of redistribution was reflected in a number of papers raising social issues. The Synthesis Report then synthesised the main insights and drew together elements which might form a basis for a regional development strategy.

One of the main conclusions of the Synthesis Report was that growth should be induced through restructuring the regional economy towards greater international competitiveness. In addition, various sectors were surveyed for their prospects for export promotion, as well as for internally generated growth. Strategies coupling both growth and redistribution focused largely on small business promotion in a number of sectors, and to a lesser extent on smallholder agriculture and the informal sector. Redistributive strategies centred primarily on infrastructural development (as a means also to stimulating growth). Policies to enable disadvantaged communities to benefit from strategies such as tourism were also suggested.

Despite the attention paid to the creation of a sustainable and equitable growth strategy, very little consideration was given to women's socio-economic position in the region and to the constraints which are likely to limit their access to the benefits of proposals. Notwithstanding the project team requesting to subconsul-

tants to deal with the position of women in their papers, gender issues were included in a variable way in the Reports, and as a result were reflected only partially in the Synthesis Report.

After the compilation of the Synthesis Report, a separate paper on gender in the regional economy was commissioned. This study was released as a separate report, and was not used to alter the arguments and conclusions of the Synthesis Report, precisely because of the latter's inadequate concern with gender. The discussion that follows is not an exhaustive treatment of the Report. Rather, it draws from and extends some of the arguments made in the gender study (Posel et al, 1993) to highlight key problems in its discourse.

• Growth Strategies

In the Report a great deal of attention is placed on restructuring the region to make it more competitive internationally. In particular, there is a focus on enabling the region to adopt the new flexible technologies which have been prevalent internationally, so that it may move beyond the predominantly low-wage pattern which has come to characterise the region. Emphasis is also placed on export promotion and on growth in sectors (such as tourism) in which the region has a comparative advantage.

These proposals for restructuring occur in the context of a growing feminisation of the labour force. Between 1980 and 1991, women's employment in KwaZulu/Natal increased by 28 percent, while men's employment remained static (CSS Reports: 02-80-05, 1980; 03-01-01, 1991).⁴ The ways in which these growth strategies might affect the position of women in the economy, and particularly their access to employment opportunities, however, is not discussed in the Synthesis Report. Although it is not possible to predict unambiguously what the implications might be for women's employment, insights may be drawn from the international experience and from a closer examination of why the labour force in KwaZulu/Natal has become more feminised.

Internationally, the emphasis on supply-side economics and pressure towards export promotion and greater international competitiveness in the 1980s has been translated into an efficiency and cost-cutting exercise in production (Standing, 1989). Calls for freer labour markets, and the rolling back of protective labour legislation have facilitated cost-cutting processes in the labour process. Producers have come to rely increasingly on flexibility in production, in part through the use of part-time, temporary and contract workers, and through the sub-contracting of production orders to small firms. Women have emerged as highly desirable employees in these circumstances, as Jenson and Hagen explain:

because their relationship to the labour market traditionally displayed characteristics of flexibility Individual women have had

a less than continuous relationship to the labour market, moving in and out of employment in response to the demand for labour and their personal possibilities (1988:10).

Moves towards greater flexibility and competitiveness in domestic production in South Africa have been constrained by the country's limited access to new technology and difficulties associated with implementation (Freund, 1992). Attempts at increasing cost competitiveness have probably coincided with more direct efforts to reduce labour costs, through employing cheaper labour and renaming and regrading occupations. Other ways in which industries have responded to recession are in the growth of small industries producing basic consumer goods in metropolitan areas (McCarthy, 1993), and through the location of low wage industries, in sectors facing pressure, in industrial decentralisation points. Both have been associated with a disproportionate growth in women's employment, where much of this increase typifies low wage, insecure employment.

The growth in women's employment in KwaZulu/Natal has also been linked to the expansion of labour-intensive sectors (such as clothing) which are predominantly female-employing. At the same time, significant male-employing sectors, such as mining, construction and transport have declined, and more capital-intensive parts of manufacturing (for example, chemicals) have cut back their labour forces in the context of recession.

It is impossible to say with certainty what the effects of restructuring towards greater international competitiveness will be on women's employment. The Synthesis Report argues for a shift towards the more 'post-fordist' versions of flexibility, relying to a greater extent on a more skilled workforce. Internationally, this model has been associated with the development of a small core of skilled and generally male workers, coupled with a larger peripheral flexible and mainly female labour force. If South Africa does follow the international trend, women's employment will not necessarily shift from the classic focus on largely low wage, less secure work.

It is unlikely, however, that a purely post-fordist model will be adopted in the region, or in South Africa more generally. Elements of post-fordist production may become intermeshed, or may co-exist, with more traditional forms of production, as has occurred elsewhere (Amin and Thrift, 1992; Laborgne and Lipietz, 1993). Furthermore, difficulties with implementing new forms of production may continue to impede its introduction. In this context, the emphasis on export promotion may replicate patterns in women's employment which have been observed in the 1980s. It is also possible, however, that South Africa's greater international exposure, particularly through its agreement on GATT, may result in employment losses in some sectors. The predominantly female-employ-

ing textiles and clothing sectors are often cited as vulnerable in this process (Maree, 1994).

Restructuring along the lines anticipated in the Synthesis Report, and the effects of international competition, may also lead to a restructuring of the space economy of the region as different places become desired locations, and as different kinds of labour are sought. It is not clear exactly what the spatial effects will be, as contradictory processes may be at work. In the Synthesis Report, it is noted that the shift to a new incentive package since 1991, as part of the changes to the Regional Industrial Development Programme, has had a differential effect over space. Incentives are now offered to all areas other than the core metropolitan areas, but at a far lower rate than was previously available. The Report suggests that locations close to metropolitan areas 'appear to be gaining at the expense of more remote decentralisation points' (SSMB/DRA, 1993:92). The picture may be more complex, however. Incentives may have been only one factor encouraging industries to locate in decentralisation points, and growth in these areas may not have been purely artificial as is often assumed (Platzky, 1993). Further, in a number of developing countries, moves away from import-substitution led industrialisation towards greater external orientation have been associated with the growth of industry in peripheral areas (Amsden, 1991; Hart, 1993).

In KwaZulu/Natal it is probable that the spatial effects of restructuring will be variable, both across decentralisation points and between firms within them. Uncertainty over the future of decentralised industries makes it difficult to ascertain how women's employment in these industries will be affected. Historically, the feminisation of the labour force may be tied partly to the growth of decentralisation points. Since 1980, employment growth in these areas in the region has been higher than in most other parts of the country. Between 1982 and 1991, some 53 925 jobs were created in the region under the Regional Industrial Development Programme (Baldogh, 1993). The increase in women's employment in the KwaZulu Finance and Investment Corporation (KFC) Estates was particularly rapid. By 1990, some 58 percent of the 41 140 jobs in these points were occupied by women (KFC, nd), compared to 32 percent in the main metropolitan area, Durban.⁵

As is the case in Durban, the growth of women's employment in decentralised industries has been partly tied to the importance of 'traditional' women's employment. In her study of decentralised manufacturing industries, Ardington (1984) accounts for the increased employment of women by suggesting also that women are prepared to work for lower wages and that, with fewer alternatives, they tend to be more willing to accept temporary employment. The employment of relatively inexperienced African women in these industries therefore represented

an opportunity for industries to keep costs low in a recessionary context.

The nature of women's working conditions in decentralised industries raises questions about how policy towards these areas should be viewed from a feminist perspective. At one level, much employment in these industries is characterised by primitive working conditions, reports of sexual harassment, and a 30 percent wage differential between decentralised and metropolitan jobs (Pudifin and Ward, 1986). At another level, however, Bonnin et al (1991) argue that employment in decentralised points is important for women. It represents a better alternative than farm work or domestic employment in some areas, and allows women to maintain closer ties with their families.

If moves away from past policies of excessive subsidisation result in the decline of these industries, then many of the jobs created will become vulnerable and women's economic position in these areas will be adversely affected. Development strategies for these areas therefore may be as necessary as they are for the declining coal mining areas discussed in the Synthesis Report. In those places where growth is not threatened, however, more attention will need to be paid to improving the conditions for women workers.

The debate over how women's employment in decentralisation points should be evaluated raises broader questions over the way in which the feminisation of the labour process should be viewed. As demonstrated earlier, much of the growth in women's employment in the region as a whole is within low waged, vulnerable jobs, and women are crowded into a few areas of the labour market. Little attention, however, is given in the Report to improving conditions for women in the sectors in which they are predominantly employed. For example, the tourism industry is seen as a target for development and for the generation of foreign currency, but it is also an industry which is predominantly occupied by women earning low wages.

A critical aspect of regional development strategies therefore must be to challenge the sexual division of labour which limits women's access to employment, and confines them to relatively lower paid work. These strategies would also have to be sensitive to differences between women, and might include affirmative action policies and skills training programmes, to ensure that women move up the skills and wages hierarchy, as well as others. Although the Synthesis Report, as part of its focus on increasing competitiveness, does stress the importance of training to enhance the skills levels of workers, women's access to these courses is not addressed. Education programmes may also be necessary to overcome the unwritten barriers and taboos regarding women's work and the kind of positions they may occupy. Without such programmes, it is likely that very few women will be able to take advantage of changing opportunities in the region.

These comments also apply to sectors other than manufacturing and tourism. Women's employment is, in fact, more concentrated in the tertiary sector than elsewhere, reflecting the importance of gender divisions defining women's access to paid work. Jenson and Hagen, for example, remark that women are employed in public sector jobs 'because so many of them were in the area of care-giving and social services, long associated in popular discourse with "feminine talents"' (1988:7). Similarly, many occupations within commerce and finance are seen as drawing on women's 'natural' abilities, and have come to be regarded as women's work. In these sectors, occupations such as clerical work, cleaning, reception and sales are generally occupied by women. Most of these jobs are 'at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy' (McDowell, 1991:402) and are poorly rewarded.

There are, however, strong racial differences between women in the kinds of jobs to which they have access. White women are over-represented in the financial sector, a relatively high income sector, but less than one percent of all African women were found in this sector. White, coloured and Indian women were also relatively well represented in the commerce sector, whereas less than one tenth of all economically active African women were employed there. One third of all African women work in the service sector, about half being employed in domestic work, and the rest within the government service mainly as teachers and nurses (CSS Report: 03-01-09, 1991).

Despite the importance in employment terms of the tertiary sector, and particularly for that of women, the Synthesis Report offers few policy suggestions for this sector, with the exception of tourism which is targeted as a dynamic growth industry. Commerce and finance are largely seen as following growth elsewhere in the economy. There is no discussion of either the public sector or of domestic service. This silence may reflect a perception that the public sector is a drain on resources, and that domestic service is an area in which regional strategies should not be involved.

The focus on growth sectors, and the relative neglect of the tertiary sector (a position which has been critiqued elsewhere, see Bagguely et al, 1990), has the effect of excluding consideration of significant sectors in which women are employed. Further, the emphasis on the performance of sectors and how they might be re-oriented, limits questions of labour market movements and working conditions within these sectors. As this discussion has illustrated, however, when considering gender, examination of the labour market is critical, as is the importance of recognising what kinds of jobs are likely to be created, and for whom.

• Redistribution with Growth

In examining strategies which are able to couple growth with redistribution, the Synthesis Report focuses on promoting small business in a number of sectors and on improving the environment in which these businesses might operate. In addition, in certain sectors (such as tourism), community participation in projects in which growth is generated is stressed, as is the community's access to resources (eg finance).

While the emphasis on enabling previously disadvantaged groups to benefit from regional development strategies is commendable, the gender dimensions of unequal access to resources have not been examined. In community projects, questions may be raised about who, within the community, controls the projects, does the work, and gains the income. Similar questions may be raised in relation to small business development.

Data from the Small Business Development Corporation (1993)⁶ suggests that only 6 percent of monies in 1993 was loaned to women in the region. The proportion of women who own their own business may be higher, but the figure also reflects the relatively smaller size of loans and businesses held by women as opposed to men. Unless specific efforts are made to the contrary, it is likely that the benefits of a small business development strategy will be skewed in favour of men. In this regard, research needs to be undertaken to establish where women are located within small business, and the barriers to and constraints on their participation.

The Synthesis Report's examination of small cane growers, and its broader emphasis on smallholder agriculture and associated land reform, is equally silent about these kinds of gender constraints and concerns. Drawing from Vaughan's (1993) work, Posel et al (1993) note some of the problems experienced in these schemes. In KwaZulu/Natal, there are over 42 000 small cane growers, the majority of whom are contract farmers. An estimated 65 percent of small grower producers are women, but because contracts have to be signed by those with rights in land and therefore with legal status to enter into a contract, contract holders are mostly men. In terms of codified and amended customary law, only unmarried women with dependants may hold land in their own right. Once the cane is harvested and sold, the income generated is paid to whoever the contract holder is, regardless of who does the work. Since registered owners are often migrants:

production levels are often undermined in the prevailing situation where rights in land and in the crop are vested in absent men, rather than the women who are responsible for production (Vaughan, 1992:435, cited in Posel et al, 1993:57).

Vaughan (1993) suggests that women are not content with the status quo, and

that they complain that they do not have money to make big investments in farming.

A smallholder policy which does not consider gender dimensions could reinforce present inequities, impede production, and thereby undermine the goals of redistribution with growth. If women are to benefit from a smallholder development strategy, attention will have to be given to issues of rights to land and to the income generated. While these are essentially legal issues, which are the responsibility of national government, regional strategies risk ineffectiveness if they are not acknowledged.

The informal sector is another area which is viewed as being worthy of promotion in the Synthesis Report. At the same time, however, the limits to this process are recognised, particularly given that much of informal sector work in KwaZulu/Natal is survival based and does not represent a maximisation strategy for workers.

Women number over half of the informal sector in the region, and their participation is rapidly growing. Studies suggest that women-headed households are more likely to depend on informal than on formal sector earnings (May, 1993a, Naidoo, 1993a). Women are concentrated in four main areas of work: prostitution, service work, petty trading and home-based piece work. Apart from certain areas of prostitution, informal work leads to low incomes, and women's earnings are well below half of those of men (May, 1993a).

Women's rapidly growing involvement in the informal sector may be attributed to both 'pull' and 'push' factors. On the one hand, women may have been pulled into informal sector work which, in some cases, is seen to be better than other opportunities which were previously available (such as domestic or farm work). In addition, it allows women flexibilities which formal sector employment does not. A particularly attractive, although not necessarily desirable, aspect of informal sector work is that women may bring their children to work with them if alternative care is unavailable. They may also stay home when necessary and earn money as required. Women therefore may move in and out of the informal economy, with a flexibility which is important also to older women who may have to stay home due to illness.

On the other hand, the depressed state of the economy has pushed more and more women into self-employment and other survival strategies. Although attractive in certain respects, women's involvement in petty trading or service work often does not represent a preferred alternative. Hours of work are generally long, and responsibilities in the home still proscribe their performance in the informal sector. Not surprisingly, the informal sector is not popular with young women who would, if possible, choose better jobs and wages.

Policy suggestions within the Synthesis Report focus largely on further

deregulation of the informal sector. This proposal is positive insofar as it provides women with more space in which to operate, but it may also have contradictory effects. Naidoo (1993), for example, argues that the deregulation which has occurred in Durban's Warwick Avenue triangle has facilitated the entry of formal Indian traders who use local women as a front, and pay them low wages. Traders have also brought in manufactured goods which have displaced some of women's previous activities of producing goods for sale. These developments are consistent with Friedman and Hambridge's (1992) warning that with deregulation, activities could become more profitable, encouraging men to take over.

The Synthesis Report's proposals to achieve redistribution with growth through promoting small business development, smallholder agriculture and informal sector work are potentially important strategies for the region. However, as this discussion illustrates, gender relations permeate and alter the effects of policy in ways often not considered within regional strategies. By ignoring the dynamics between men and women, and the constraints which limit women's participation in these activities, it is possible that the scope for both redistribution and growth will be undermined.

• Redistribution

One of the most important ways in which redistribution is to be achieved in terms of the Synthesis Report is through the improvement of infrastructure within the region. A number of studies have demonstrated the inadequacies in, and disparities of, the distribution of physical and social infrastructure resources between race groups and areas in the region (see eg Smith, 1993; Ardington, 1992; Hambridge and Krige, 1992; Stavrou, 1992; Krige, 1989 and 1990). In general terms, services are far worse for Africans than for other groups, urban and metropolitan townships are generally better off than informal settlements (although conditions in townships are by no means adequate), while rural areas are generally worst off.

The Report focuses on physical infrastructure, and its development through public works and similar programmes. It is argued that this strategy would have the added advantage of stimulating growth through construction-led inward industrialisation, and through improvements in productivity. Given the enormous deficits in infrastructure in the region, and the importance of improving services to reduce unpaid labour, this strategy is positive from a gender perspective.

There are a number of caveats to this appraisal, however. Firstly, much of the emphasis in the report is on physical infrastructure, with little discussion of social services. Childcare, in particular, is ignored, but it is a critical problem for women

in the region. Educare training institutions, for example, report a growth in demand for creches as women increasingly go out to work (Desmond, 1993). Nonetheless, fewer than 5 percent of children between 0 and 6 years old are at a childcare facility (Biersteker, 1993). Most African women rely on relatives, neighbours or unregistered childminders. Studies suggest, however, that these solutions are seen as less reliable and are more expensive than institutions (Liddell and Kemp, 1991). The extent to which childcare, as opposed to other kinds of infrastructural provision, is a priority for low-income women, is unknown. Certainly, it is a question that warrants further investigation and which needs to be included in the array of options offered in local development programmes.

Secondly, while an infrastructure development programme is crucial, its ability to assist women depends on how it is implemented. Affordability is a major concern. For example, some of the ways in which water is being provided in the region (eg through water kiosks) raises the per unit cost of water, disadvantaging low-income women. Gender relations within communities and households may also have very significant effects on women's access to the benefit of programmes, as the case of electrification shows.

Recent electrification programmes have not been as useful to women as might have been expected. A recent study of electrification (DRA, 1993) shows that heads of households (two-thirds of which are men) tended to make decisions about whether and what kind of equipment to buy. In many cases, more priority was given by male heads to buying items such as televisions and hi-fis, than to equipment associated with alleviating the burden of housework. Similarly, Gwagwa (1993) showed that women generally put more money into cooking facilities, but had lower income to do so. In most households, income is a major determinant of electricity usage, with only the highest income groups replacing alternative fuels with electricity. Women-headed households, which predominate in the low-income groups (May, 1993a) are therefore in a weaker position with regard to electricity usage.

Other factors may also impede the use of electricity, and may threaten the viability of the programme. Gwagwa and Todes (1994), for example, suggest that because liaison officers are men, who generally interact with men in the community, appropriate education around electricity usage is not occurring. The absence of accessible repair and payment facilities is another concern (May et al, 1994).

Furthermore policies like electrification do not challenge the gender division of labour in terms of which domestic work is women's work. At best they may meet women's 'practical needs', but as demonstrated earlier, the position of women in the economy and in the household may limit the extent to which even

these needs are met.

Thirdly, the intention to stimulate growth and employment prospects in the region through the provision of infrastructure needs more careful consideration. In particular, affirmative action strategies may be necessary to challenge occupational segregation. In 1991, only 6 percent of workers within the construction sector were women (CSS Report 03-01-09, 1991), and if present patterns are followed, women may not get access to the jobs generated. Paradoxically, because the jobs created in public works schemes are likely to be at a lower rate of pay than the construction industry in general, women may come to occupy these jobs, as has occurred elsewhere (Laurie, 1994). This again raises the question of how to evaluate and respond to the way in which the labour force is becoming feminised.

Conclusion

By examining the case of strategies for KwaZulu/Natal, this paper has attempted to highlight some of the deficiencies in regional development discourse from a feminist perspective. Regional development strategies may have important impacts on what kinds of jobs are created, who gets access to them, and where this occurs. Furthermore, they affect the nature of infrastructure that is provided, and the manner in which this is done. All of these, as we have shown, may have complex gendered effects.

It is widely acknowledged that old style regional policy did not take social issues into account through its emphasis on reducing spatial inequalities. The silence on gender can partially be understood in these terms. Newer approaches to regional development have the potential to address social concerns to a greater extent (Todes, 1993), but gender inequities are rarely addressed. The dominance, at least within the South African context, of the competitive regions approach, is perhaps one reason why this lacuna remains. This gap, however, is not necessarily inherent in this approach. The emphasis within competitive regions strategies, as well as within other recent approaches to regional development, on the quality of place and on the skills training which is needed to move beyond crude forms of competition between places, potentially provides a space in which gender may be taken more seriously.

The Synthesis Report on regional development strategies for KwaZulu/Natal is framed in terms of a broader view of competitive regions, and does consider questions of redistribution. Measures to improve productivity and to increase levels of skill, however, need to recognise the growing feminisation of the labour force. In particular, more attention must be paid to the ways in which women's participation is shaped by their responsibility for reproduction, and by gender relations more broadly. Furthermore, strategies will need to ensure that women,

as well as men, move beyond the largely low-wage labour which characterises the region. Unless the link between the sexual division of labour and the position of women is acknowledged explicitly in development programmes, attempts to achieve significant redistribution and the effective development of communities will be frustrated.

This paper has argued that the feminisation process which has occurred in KwaZulu/Natal over the last decade is not necessarily a panacea for women, nor is it an unproblematic process. Restructuring of the economy therefore needs to occur in ways which are sensitive to the connection between individuals and household survival, and to the kinds of employment which will be made available. It has been argued that a focus on social reproduction needs to be a central part of regional development strategies in the South African context. This raises difficult questions in a resource poor context. It also suggests broader concerns about how social reproduction is valued socially, issues which traditionally lie outside the realm of regional strategies. It has been argued, however, that it will not be possible to address fundamental issues of inequality or equity without seriously considering the feminisation of poverty, women's access to physical and social services, and the vast numbers of people and households who are dependent on women's earnings.

NOTES

- 1 *The Economic Development of Region E (Natal, KwaZulu and Northern Transkei)*, Senegae, Smit and Maughan Brown & Data Research Africa, 1993. The Project Team consisted of Philip Harrison, Professor Dan Smit, Professor Mike Morris and Julian May.
- 2 The Report focused on the region defined at the time as Region E. Most of Region E is now KwaZulu/Natal in terms of the recent delimitation of Provinces. The Region E also included a very underdeveloped part of the Transkei (now in the Eastern Cape), but data sources for that area are poor, and treatment of the area was quite cursory in most of the reports.
- 3 'Comparative advantage' refers to the particular strengths, generally resource based, of regions compared to other areas. 'Competitive advantage' is a more developed concept, referring to a wider set of largely created rather than natural strengths, and the way the broader environment (which includes regions and localities) shapes the competitive success of firms.
- 4 These figures rely on census reports which, while problematic in a number of ways, are the only macro figures available.
- 5 Nevertheless, women's employment in manufacturing also grew by 28 percent in Durban in the period.
- 6 Other data sources are unfortunately not available. The SBDC data probably reflects white owned businesses to a greater extent than other sources, and also reflects larger businesses than, for example, the informal sector.

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