

The Gendered Implications of Global Commodity Chain: Case Studies from Bangladesh and South Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of Global Commodity Chain (GCC) with an aim to study how gender inequalities prevail at the global labor market. It argues that the implications of GCC on women can be understood by looking at the broader institutional framework such as ethical trade policies. By focusing on Bangladesh Garment Industry and South African Fruit commodity chain, the paper shows how trade policies both at the global and national level have impacted the lives of women working at the bottom of the chain. The paper suggests that the commodity chain literature needs to incorporate a 'feminist commodity chain analysis' in order to bring gender perspectives to the abstract discussion on global capitalism.

Keywords: Gender, Global Commodity Chain, Global Labor Market, Ready-made Garment Industry, Ethical Trade, Fruit Commodity Chain

Introduction

The concept of Global Commodity Chain (GCC) has been used widely in academia for understanding inequality (Barrientos, 2001; Kaplinsky, 2000; Palpacuer, 2008; Ramamurthy, 2003, 2004). It was derived from the world system theory and later developed by Gary Gereffi and his colleagues (2004). Commodity chain has been developed later by Jennifer Bair (2005) who proposed for second generation of commodity chain. The conventional commodity chain analysis however lacks gender perspectives. Most of the existing literatures on GCC focus too narrowly on firms upgrading and economic competitiveness and therefore fail to capture the winners and losers in global economy. Consequently, they obscure the question of gender inequality that is central to the survival of global restructuring. Therefore, a

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gender focus on GCC can bring 'subjectivity into an otherwise rather abstract discussion about processes, structures, markets and states' and can reveal how gendered power dimensions of global economy increase unequal power relation through the process of inclusion and exclusion (Marchand & Runyan, 2000, p. 16). The study on Commodity Chain has been developed further by Florence Palpacuer (2008) has brought gender lens in GCC research. She explained how capital accumulation at the top level was made possible by 'externalizing risk' through subcontracting and controlling governance within the commodity chain and how these financialization process contribute to deteriorate the working condition and living standard of women worker at the base. The questions which need to be asked now: who control the commodity chain? Who gain? Who lost? Are women benefitted from GCC?

This paper examines the concept of GCC with an aim to understand how gender inequalities prevail at the global labor market. It explains how global commodity chains operate in larger social and institutional environment. The paper focuses on Bangladesh Garment Industry and South African Fruit commodity chain, both buyer-driven chains, to comprehend how trade policies both at the global and national level have impacted the lives of women workers. The article chooses Bangladesh and South Africa as case studies because of two reasons. First, both countries have a colonial past. The histories of the independence war of Bangladesh in 1971 and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 have affected both countries the way they have formulated development and economic policies in the post-independence period. Before the independence, both countries have taken an import-substitution policy and most of the industries were run by the government. In the post-independence era, both Bangladesh and South Africa however, has focused on trade liberalization and has shifted from import substitution to export-oriented industrialization in order to be integrated into the global economy. Second, in both case studies, women work at the bottom of the commodity chain. Therefore, the article analyses how broader institutional framework, such as international trade policies in the context of Bangladesh and national trade policies in South Africa have affected the lives of women working at the end of apparel and fruit commodity chain respectively. The paper argues that the commodity chain analysis often fails to bring any gender perspective into the discussion on the global capitalism and therefore a new commodity chain analysis is needed in order to analyze the dynamics of gender relation within GCC. It agrees with Priti Ramamurthy (2004) who proposed a new approach that she called 'feminist commodity chains approach', an alternative analytic framework to realist commodity chain analysis.

Conceptualizing Global Commodity Chain

Commodity Chain

The term 'Commodity Chain' (CC) dated back to 1980s and was originated in the 'World system theory' adopted by Terrence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein (1977). Commodity Chain is defined as 'a network of labor and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity' (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986, p. 159 quoted in Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994, p. 2). The production processes of a commodity or product are consisted of several boxes or nodes, with each node represents distinct production operation. The production activities are then linked with each other by chains, for example, the raw material input is linked with a finished product. The commodity chain thereby, has helped to understand the spatial dispersion of the production activities. CC has also been used as a tool to understand why certain firms or countries become more profitable than others within the chain. The concept therefore has helped to explain how wealth is distributed between countries and reproduces a stratified and hierarchical world-system and thereby constituting the core, semi-periphery and periphery (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1977 quoted in Bair, 2005).

Global Commodity Chain

Gary Gereffi and his colleagues (1994) developed the term 'Global Commodity Chain' (GCC) in order to understand the changing pattern and the 'emergence of a new International division of labor' in the contemporary global economy. GCC is defined as 'sets of inter-organizational networks clustered around one commodity or product, linking households, enterprises and states to one another within the world economy' (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994, p. 2). GCC analyzes how global industries are organized within the commodity chain. It emphasizes 'competitiveness', 'industrial upgrading' and 'linking up with lead firms in the global industry' as a way to national development. GCC particularly focuses on the prospect of economic development in the developing countries. The concept of GCC is useful for understanding why the developing countries' share in the global economy does not increase despite their industrial growth and why some countries are more prosperous than others despite having similar level of industrialization. In order to understand GCC has shifted the focus from industrialization to industrial upgrading. GCC highlights that the economic development of a country does not depend industrialization alone, it rather depends on a country's position in the global commodity chain and the extent to which a country can move up the global economic hierarchy by involving itself in core activities in the production process. GCC has provided the opportunities for the developing countries to enhance their export and to

be integrated into the global economy. As GCC has fragmented the production process, no country needs to create a complete product. The developing countries can enter the Global Commodity Chain by inserting into any stage of the production, without producing the final product. As a result, many countries now participate into GCC by exporting raw materials, for apparel supply chain, for example.

Recently, there has been a shift in commodity chain research, from GCC to Global Value Chain (GVC). GVC is distinguished from GCC in the greater influence of international business literature on it as opposed to more sociological perspective of GCC (Bair, 2005, p. 164). But GCC and GVC reflect each other in the question of 'firm-level industrial upgrading. A new term 'Global Care Chain' has also emerged out of the GCC research study (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2005).

Producer-Driven and Buyer-Driven Commodity Chain

There are three dimensions of GCC: i) input-output ii) territoriality and iii) governance. Gary Gereffi (1994) focused on governance of GCC and divided the governance structure into two types: a) Producer Driven Commodity Chain and b) Buyer Driven Commodity Chain. In the producer-driven CC, the central role is played by Transnational Corporations (TNCs), including capital and/or technology intensive industries, such as automobiles, computers, aircraft and electrical machines. In contrast, in buyer-driven chains, the lead role is played by large retailers, branded merchandisers and trading companies which outsource the production work in other countries, mostly located in the developing world. The buyer-driven chain includes labor-intensive factories producing garments, footwear, toys, furniture or ornaments. Whereas producer-driven chains are controlled from the point of production, buyer-driven chains are controlled from the point of consumption. In other words, production shapes demand in the producer-driven chains and consumption determines demand in the buyer-driven chains.

Gereffi (1994) argued that buyer-driven chains are a superior form of manufacturing system than producer-driven chains because of its scope for outsourcing. The reasons for outsourcing are driven by two factors: a) search for low wages or b) a need for organizational flexibility. Gereffi (1994), like name Porter (1987), found that cheap labor was a less important consideration influencing firms' competitiveness. He placed greater emphasis on organizational flexibility, relating to technological innovation, product differentiation, brand reputation, customer relations and constant upgrading. Such considerations were crucial in determining global competitiveness as well as in moving a firm's position up the global commodity chain. Gereffi

however, failed to explain the hierarchical power relation between buyer and supplier within the commodity chain, even when the supplier firm moves its position up the chain. A case study of M&S and its Turkish suppliers showed that M&S shifted the core function of design to Turkish suppliers (Tokatli et al., 2008). Although this moved the suppliers' position up the commodity chain, it did not necessarily translate into renegotiation of power and failed to change their asymmetric relation with M&S, often persist through practice of accreditation and reclamation.

Gibbon and Stefano (2005) criticized Gereffi (1994) for narrowly dividing firms' governance structures into producer-driven and buyer-driven chains, largely ignoring the broader institutional framework within which the firms operate. They argued that the concept of a Global Commodity Chain is more than how firms decide whether to make or buy something. For example, the governance of the global clothing industry is also related to the Multifibre Arrangement and NAFTA rules and these external conditions and regulation affect the governance of GCC. Gibbon and Stefano (2005) therefore, divide GCC governance into two categories: a) public form of governance or external governance, such as international trade agreement and domestic regulations and b) private forms of governance or internal governance, such as corporate strategies, firm organization.

GCC and Ethical Trading

The recent development in GCC research is the incorporation of corporate ethical trading and its impact on northern retailers. In the UK, for example, there is immense pressure from consumers, the media, NGOs, active groups such as Labor behind the Label and War on Want, to ensure that the retailers avoid buying from companies who violate workers' labor rights. Defying the rules of ethical trading constitutes a risk to 'corporate reputation' and threat to 'customer trust and loyalty' for any retailer (Hughes, 2012, p. 42). The northern customers however, are reluctant to pay premium prices for ethical products and they often look for low-cost purchases due to comparison buying. As a result, UK retailers such as John Lewis and Marks and Spencer are compelled to incorporate more low-cost deals for their consumers to cope with the retail competition on the one hand and follow the rules of ethical trading as part of their reputational risk management on the other hand. In the face of economic recession, the clothing retailers in the UK, therefore, have promoted a discourse of 'Value for Value', a powerful strategy that emphasizes both 'low-cost' and 'ethical credentials'. GCC research also studies how ethical trading has brought a change to the retailer's relation to its suppliers and why there is a non-compliance with the code of conduct at the factory level despite the retailers' commitment towards it (Hoang & Jones, 2012).

Second Generation of Commodity Chain: understanding inequality within GCC

More recent works on GCC focus on 'global distribution of wealth within commodity chain' and tend to link commodity chain with inequality. Kaplinsky (2000) showed how the control of three elements of commodity chain: barrier to entry and rent, governance and systematic efficiency determine who gains and who loses in the chain. She asked: why has there been so little correspondence between the geographical spread of economic activity and the spreading of the gains from participating in global product markets?

The similar question is put forward by Jennifer Bair (2005) who critically examined the limitations of commodity chain research. She problematized the conventional GCC research by arguing that firm upgrading and the competitiveness concept of GCC focused too narrowly within the context of a particular industry, failing to address the critical question of winner and losers in today's global economy. Bair (2005) asked: 'What are the social implications of upgrading? How does upgrading translate into the lives of peripheral workers? What are its implications for the gender-based division of labor?' (p. 167). As a solution to these enquiries, Bair (2005) proposed for a 'second generation of commodity chain' which would focus on the broader political-economic environment encompassing the institutional and systemic factors like regulatory mechanisms and market institutions that shape the chains and that are critical for understanding their developmental outcomes for firms and for the workers associated with them. Bair showed how regulatory mechanism, EU trade policy, NAFTA, for example, negatively affected the developing country exporters and how social and institutional relations at the state and local level impacted participation within the commodity chain.

Issues and Challenges of GCC: Bringing Gender into GCC Analysis

Although GCC has many positive outcome outcomes for the economic development, especially for the developing countries, it has few issues, challenges and risks involving collapse in social cohesion, wearing down of labor welfare and environmental degradation. There are also potential risks involved for the countries with weak governance system. GCC also widens the economic gaps between countries participating in the commodity chain. The countries who particularly participate into low value added activities will lag behind in the long run. GCC also exposes the local economy to the external shocks. After the phase out of Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA) policy, a number of countries, Kenya, South Africa, Bangladesh, for example, had huge job losses in the apparel sector.

One of the main criticisms of GCC approach was its emphasis on external conditions, without giving attention to domestic institutions and internal

capacity on economic development (Henderson et al., 2002). Cramer (1999, p. 1248) has called GCC approach as 'fatalistic' as it exclusively focus on the structural constraints imposed by the multinationals. In case of Mozambican cashew industry, the most challenging issue to its exporters was domestic political constraints, state policies formulated by donor interests, for example. Another criticism of GCC is that the approach is narrow in scope as it focuses to a limited number of export- oriented manufacturing industries and a few commodities. GCC largely ignores the service sector.

Although global commodity chain is useful in understanding the uneven development within the global economy, it lacks any gender perspective. In fact, gender lens is absent in most of the commodity chain research. Women are only a faint ghost in the world-system perspective (Dunaway, 2001, p. 2). The conventional commodity chain analysis largely ignores the importance of reproductive labor and fails to analysis how labor is gendered in the global production network. A few GCC research studies however, have developed a more recent focus on the issue of social embeddedness and the question of gender in particular (Barrientos & Perrons, 1999; Barrientos, 2001; Barrientos & Kritzinger, 2004; Barrientos et. al. 2004; Kritzinger et. al. 2004; Hale & Opondo, 2005; Palpacuer, 2008; Raghuram, 2004). Initial research studies on gender and global value chains stemmed from a focus on ethical codes. These studies showed how workers' rights were violated within the production chain and why ethical code should be implemented. Hale and Opondo (2005) looked at the implications of global value chains for women workers in the Kenya-UK cut flower chain. They were interested in the link between the supply chain and corporate social responsibility in the implementation of ethical codes. The buyer side, UK supermarkets, is very eager to implement a code of conduct in the factories to improve the conditions of women workers. They, however, do not agree in accepting the impact of their buying practice and production schedule on women workers:

As is typical in buyer-driven chains, the pressures that supermarkets exert on suppliers are pushed down the chain to workers. If employers are working in a climate of powerlessness and uncertainty, it is hardly surprising that workers are in a similar if not more precarious situation (Hale & Opondo, 2005, p. 317).

Therefore, some of the problems the workers face can be linked directly to pressures from the UK supermarkets. For example, long hours of compulsory overtime are particularly common in the run-up to occasions such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. The women workers faced a number of issues such as insecurity of employment, irregularity of work, compulsory overtime,

inadequate wages, exposure to chemicals and lack of transport facilities. Apart from these problems, women workers were also exposed to sexual harassment from supervisors who ask sexual favors in exchange for time off, employment, promotion or bonuses. Women workers do not have access to maternity leave and often work until the date of delivery. Sometimes, they hide their pregnancy to have a longer leave to spend with the baby. If they reveal their pregnancy, they are assigned light duties as supervisors think that 'pregnancy is not in the hands, but in the stomach' (Hale & Opondo, 2005, p. 311). Even though the ethical codes address the concerns of women workers, they often fail to protect women workers' rights. Hale and Opondo (2005) therefore, call for supply chains to be humanized, which would mean recognizing the pressures on the women workers at the base of the chain. It also means focusing not on the product but on the people who are involved in the chain.

Priti Ramamurthy (2004) called the commodity chain 'realist commodity chain'. She criticized the commodity chain analysis by raising four main arguments. First, there is a lack of attention to women's labor in the international division of labor in realist commodity chain analysis. While the commodity chain conceptualizes the global economy as trade-led or export led, Ramamurthy called the global economy as much as 'female led as much as export led' (Ramamurthy, 2004, p. 740). Second, the conventional commodity chain does not focus much on the process of feminization of labor, which refers both to the increasing participation of women in the global labor force and increasing informalisation and deterioration of the work. Third, global commodity chain analysis does not discuss how the nation state and multinational corporations exploit existing gender ideologies to boost the economy and the export. Fourth and last, the realist commodity chain analysis does not focus on reproduction of labor or household as an important part of the international division of labor. As a result, the commodity chain fails to analyze how the national and international policies, structural adjustment policy for example, enhance the burden of unpaid care work for women at the household level. Ramamurthy (2003) critically asked: 'Why is it that the area under cotton [in Jamulamma's village] has gone up and more women and children are working in the cotton fields, but fewer of them are wearing cotton saris?' (p. 524)

In order to understand the lives of women working at the end of commodity chain, Ramamurthy (2004) proposed for a feminist commodity chain analysis as an alternative to global commodity chain approach. By focusing on the lives of women working in the cotton field in a village in Andhra Pradesh, India, Ramamurthy analyses why feminist commodity chain is important to study. In contrast to the conventional commodity chain which has a narrow focus on core and periphery and the power of multinational companies located at the

first world, feminist commodity chain gives emphasis on the third world and local identities. It focuses both on production and consumption of a product. It provides an understanding of how labor is racialised and gendered. Feminist commodity chain provides a better understanding of process of globalization and industrialization by focusing on women's labor and gender ideologies in the discussion of production process.

Florence Palpacuer (2008) studied the situation of women working at the bottom of the global commodity chain. She borrowed Bair's (2005) idea of the second generation of GCC research for examining the social and institutional context of GCC and showed how changes in governance pattern at the top level affect the working conditions of women workers at the base of GCCs. Palpacuer (2008) argued that the growing financialisation across Europe, America and in some Asian countries, Japan, for example, emergence of 'shareholder capitalism', growing emphasis on maintaining global leadership position and growth of a new power sphere of 'transnational capitalist class' had brought new consequences for supplier relations through externalizing risks, imposing new standard and barrier entry on the supplier's side which in turn downward pressure on the living standard of the people working at the bottom of the commodity chain. She particularly focused on the deteriorating work conditions down the chain, which was a result of enhanced competitive pressures passed on to the workers by suppliers in the form of flexibilization and feminization of works. It led to more insecure, precarious and harder work pace and greater threats to the workers' organizing efforts. In the following section, the paper elaborates on Palpacuer's argument on the impact of GCC and broader institutional framework on women's lives by analyzing two different contexts: one is the garment industry of Bangladesh and another is the fruit commodity chain of South Africa.

The Ready-made Garment Industry: Bangladesh

The rise and growth of the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh can be called phenomenal and unprecedented. The industry came into the sight as a result of the economic policy changes both at the national and global level. After the independence in 1971, Bangladesh implemented the 'import substituting industrialization policy' to meet the needs of its domestic markets. However, a series of crisis, including natural disasters, cyclone, famine, decline in its major export jute manufacturing and an increasing import bill, specially food bill forced the country to change its import policy to an 'export led growth strategy' in 1982. Bangladesh government also created a supportive environment to facilitate the growth of the garment sectors, establishing Export Processing Zone (EPZ), for example.

The Multi-Fibre Arrangement policy (MFA) imposed quotas on clothing exports from a few East Asian countries, such as Hong-Kong, Taiwan and South-Korea. The imposition led to the search for quota-free zone, such as Bangladesh. Although MFA was punishing for some countries, it helped Bangladesh set up the garment industry and enter the global apparel chain. By 2000, the number of garment industries in Bangladesh was 3000 employing around 1.8 million workers and eighty percent of the workforce was women (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). By 2010, the number of industries exceeded 5000 which employed about 3.6 million workers (McKinsey & Company, 2011).

Garment industry has provided wage employment opportunities to women who had no previous working experiences. Bangladeshi women's entry into the garment industry is significant in many ways. The industry has given them greater economic independence and a more powerful voice. Women's social capabilities have also been enhanced as they are able to develop an identity for themselves and have become more confident (Khosla, 2009). There are also positive change in the aspirations of women and girls and their families towards education, employment, marriage and child bearing. The families are now more eager to invest in girls' education with the purpose of sending them to work in the garments industry (Amin, et al. 1998; Rashid, 2006 cited in Khosla, 2009). The potential to get promoted within the factory creates an upward aspiration for women, which is something new and not available in occupations such as domestic work. On gaining experience in the industry, some women change factories as this may improve their prospects for getting higher wages (Rashid, 2006 cited in Khosla, 2009). The most significant part of women's entry to garment industry in Bangladesh is their enhanced visibility in the public arena in a country dominated by the values of purdah, seclusion and patriarchy.

The garment industry however, exploited the comparative advantage of women's disadvantages, like the low price of their labor, their lower bargaining power and their docility (Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2000). The overcrowded, congested and poorly ventilated garment factory expose both male and female worker to various health risks together with the risk of fire accident. Women workers are vulnerable to further risks, sexual harassment, for example (Siddiqi, 2004). There is also lack of paid maternity leave. Gender inequality exists in wage level. Despite several complaints about factory work, most of the women workers, nevertheless, evaluate the factory job largely in positive terms, which included job satisfaction, secure income, new social networks, greater voice in household decision making, greater freedom from physical and verbal abuse, an enhance sense of self-worth and self reliance as well as greater personal freedom and autonomy (Kabeer, 2000).

Since 1985, the garment scenario and women's lives within it have changed significantly after UK, France and USA imposed quota on clothing imports from Bangladesh on the ground that the rapidity with which they had grown was threatening to disrupt the domestic markets of these countries and therefore constituted grounds for invoking the 'anti-surge' clause of the Multi-Fibre Arrangements (MFA). The imposition of quotas were extremely punishing for Bangladesh garment industry, especially for women. A two-third of the factories had closed down within three months and over 100,000 women workers were thrown out of work, many into destitution and hunger (Kabeer, 2000, p. 9).

In addition to the imposition of quota under MFA, there is also imposition of labor standards in the name of ethical trade on Bangladeshi women workers. Kabeer (2000) problematized the discourse of ethical trade policies and imposition of labor standards by the first world in an attempt to save oriental women from being exploited as cheap labor. Kabeer (2000) referred to a quote taken from the speech of the General Secretary of National Garment Workers, Bangladesh: '...not buying Bangladeshi shirts isn't going to help us, it will just take away people's jobs. Bangladeshi women workers needed better rather than fewer jobs' (p.13). She also criticized the boycott strategy of first world consumer in the name of implementing labor standard. Kabeer asked whether the consumers would react in the same way if they know the consequences of their boycott strategies on the lives of thousands of women workers and their families. The demand for universal labor standard which take no account of differences in the capacity of different countries to observe them is likely to further marginalize the larger section of world's poor in global south by taking away their job and thereby, is likely to serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of the weak. Kabeer (2000) argues that the true attempt to improve the working conditions for women workers from the developing countries should be directed away from an attempt to impose labor standards and towards a support for the organization of labor rights. Therefore, the multinationals and labor movements should focus on labor rights, not on labor standards to ensure better working conditions for the women working at the bottom of the clothing industry. The next section examines how the state policy can influence women worker's lives in South African context.

The Fruit Commodity Chain: South Africa

South Africa's fruit market is one of the largest in Europe, especially in the UK. The fruits are mainly exported from the Western Cape of the country and valued at close to US\$1,612,903 million (Greenberg, 2003 quoted in Barrientos et. al. 2004, p. 105). Traditionally, the employment relation

in South African firms was paternalistic in nature and organized around gender and race line. Men dominated the permanent job while women were employed in the temporary and seasonal jobs and earned less than man. Women constituted 69% of the temporary workforce in 1994. Women's employment was conditioned on her linkage with a male partner or relative. Another nature of the employment organization in South African firm was that most of the worker lived on the firm.

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the country has undergone significant changes both at the global level and at the national level. It liberalized the fruit sector which end the internal monopoly of the single export channel and enhanced internal competition as a result. After the political transformation, the country also introduced a wide range of national legislation in order to address injustices toward the colored people. These legislations not only brought modernization to the agricultural sector of the country, but also extended employment rights to previously excluded workers, farm and domestic workers, for example. Some of these important legislations were: the Unemployment Insurance Act (1993) provided farm workers with an unemployment insurance fund; the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 1993 and 1997 stipulated the basic conditions of employment and determined length of work week, maternity leave, sick leave and overtime pay; the Labor Relations Act 1995 also extended the right to strike action and protection against unfair dismissal to agricultural workers; the Extension of Security of Tenure Act 1997 provided workers with a basic level of security to protect them from unlawful evictions from farms and the Employment Equity Bill (1998) stipulated the implementation of affirmative action programs for particular categories of employees, for example, women (Kritzinger et. al., 2004).

The new transformation in state legislation together with global integration brought new changes in the employment strategies of the fruit growers. In the fruit chain, the supermarkets played the dominant role of retailer. They set the standards and the price of the products. Only those growers who could attain the changing demand and standards of supermarket could survive in the market competition. The growers downsized their on-farm permanent workforce and at the same time increased the employment of off-farm laborers, particularly contract laborers. This strategy was very useful for the producers because it helped them to reduce labor costs, avoid the effects of more rigid labor legislation, and enabled them to vary their labor requirements at short notice to meet the flexible but tight production schedules set by global buyers (Kritzinger et. al. 2004).

Women constituted a large percentage of the contact laborers. The changes in national legislations brought some positive changes to women worker's lives. For example, day care facilities were established for children on farm. Women could independently access employment without having any linkage with any male partner or relatives. However, in most of the cases the employment benefits did not reach women working as temporary or contact laborer. As contact workers had no official agreement with the producer, these women did not get benefits and protection provided by labor legislation. Neither, they had access to any housing arrangements provided to the permanent farm workers. There were also gender inequalities in wage levels. The precarious nature of the job made these women vulnerable to poverty. The insecure nature of employment also influenced their family and community relations in the way the contract work required them to stay away from partner and/or children. Although South African government introduced some promising legislations, it failed to implement those laws and thereby failed to benefit the women working at the base of commodity chain.

Findings from the Case Studies

Both Bangladesh and South Africa has entered global commodity chain through trade liberalization policies. While Bangladesh case focuses on labor intensive manufactured goods or ready-made garment, South African case studies non-traditional products or fruits. Both cases involved women wage workers who are employed in large industries. In contrast to women fruit workers in South Africa who were part of the existing workforce, Bangladeshi women factory workers were new entrants to the labor market. For most of the Bangladeshi workers, garment work was their first employment experience. Many of them would not have participated into the labor force without the rise and growth of Bangladesh ready-made garment industry.

Both Bangladeshi and South African workers are part of informal economy. Most of them did not have permanent working contract. As a result, they suffer from insecurity of job loss in both cases. Women dominate the workforce in both cases. In Bangladesh garment industry, women constitute 80 per cent of the workforce. In South African fruit industry, women make up 69 per cent of the temporary workforce. In both cases, there are however gendered discrimination. Both Bangladeshi women and South African women suffer from the precariousness of their employment. Women are employed in the low paid job in Bangladesh garment industry. South African women workers are also employed as contact laborers or temporary workers who do not enjoy the benefit of a permanent worker. There are also gender inequalities in wage in both cases.

The trade policies have been beneficial for both Bangladeshi and South African women workers to some extent. The rise and growth of garment industry, as a result of international trade policies, have increased the wage employment opportunities for women in Bangladesh garment industry. In case of South Africa, the changes in national trade policies have also benefitted women. The new legislations have enhanced the day care facilities for women living on fruit farms with their children. The legislations have also enabled women workers to access employment without having any reference to the male relatives.

There are however loopholes in trade policies in both cases. The Bangladesh case shows that International trade policies, including regulatory laws at the international level, MFA for example, can be punishing for women working at the bottom of the garment industry. Imposing labor code in the name of protecting labor right further marginalizes the workers and serves the interest of the powerful in the long run. The South African context shows that policies taken at national level can be both advantageous and disadvantageous for women who mostly work as temporary laborers and not as permanent workers.

Conclusion

Global Commodity Chain (GCC) has been introduced as an important tool or concept in the academia for understanding how wealth is distributed among nations in the global economy. The concept has been useful to analyze why not all developing countries have equal level of economic prosperity despite having similar industrial growth. GCC has replaced the term industrialization with industrial upgrading to show how national economic development depends on the extent to which a nation can upgrade its economic activities and move up the commodity chain in the global labor market.

GCC analysis however has been criticized on several occasions for its limitations and narrow focus on manufacturing industries, largely ignoring the service sectors. GCC has also increased the gap between the countries who participate in the core activities and the countries who take part in low value added activities. The former countries have benefitted more and gained more economic profits than the latter countries in the commodity chain. GCC has overemphasized the international and external conditions, devaluing local or domestic institutions in the production process. The main criticism against GCC, which is also the main focus of this paper, is that it lacks a gender perspective. It does not discuss the importance of feminization of labor, household, reproductive and unpaid care work and

household economy for the global labor market. As a result, the article argued that a feminist commodity chain, as proposed by Priti Ramamurthy is needed to bring gender dimension into the abstract discussion of monopoly, upgrading and core and peripheries in global commodity chain analysis.

The paper also discussed how GCC and broader institutional framework affected women's lives by focusing on two contexts: ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh and fruit commodity chain of South Africa. It analyzed how international trade policies can lead to closure of factories and job loss for women working at the bottom of Bangladesh garment industry. It also showed how national policies in South Africa can have both advantageous and disadvantageous effect on women fruit workers. Both Bangladesh and South African case studies show that any country and its women workers would benefit from participating in global commodity chain only if the production processes in GCC involves understanding of the larger socio-cultural environment together with the understanding of gender relations embedded within it.

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