

4 Labor Markets, Equity, and Social Determinants of Health

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[T]he usual argument in favour of globalisation—that it will make most workers better off, with only a few low-skilled ones losing out—has not so far been borne out by the facts. Most workers are being squeezed. (Woodall, 2006, p. 6)

INTRODUCTION

As the World Bank notes in its 2006 *World Development Report*, on the theme of equity and development: “For most of the world’s people, economic opportunities are primarily determined, or at least mediated, by the labor market—in formal and informal work. . . . The functioning of the labor market has a profound effect on equity—across workers, in patterns of access to work, and between workers and employers” (World Bank, 2005, pp. 185–86). The relation between labor-market outcomes and poverty is especially dramatic. The World Bank’s “\$1/day” and “\$2/day” poverty lines have been widely criticized as underestimating the true extent of poverty,² yet even using these measures the working poor are numerous: “There are still 486.7 million workers in the world,” including those in both formal and informal sectors, “who do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US\$1 a day poverty line and 1.3 billion workers do not earn enough to lift themselves and their family above the US\$2 a day line” (International Labour Organization, 2008, p. 10), in part because of the pernicious effects of underemployment (Felipe & Hasan, 2005, p. 11). An additional 190 million are classified by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as unemployed. The work that may be available is often hazardous to health and safety; workers in the developing world are routinely exposed to hazards similar to those eliminated from most workplaces in high-income countries generations ago.³ A further influence involves the connection between labor markets and the consequences of illness. This connection is evident in countries as diverse as the United States, where insurance coverage for much of the privately insured population is provided by employers and more than 40 million people lack any insurance coverage, and Viet Nam, where limited compulsory insurance coverage for a minority of workers employed in the formal economy coexists with a high proportion of private, out-of-pocket

health expenditure that pushes large numbers of people into poverty every year (Sepehri, Chernomas, & Akram-Lodhi, 2003; United Nations Country Team Viet Nam, 2003; van Doorslaer et al., 2006; Huong et al., 2007; Ekman, Liem, Duc, & Axelson, 2008)

What happens in labor markets thus influences material deprivation, access to medical progress, acute psychosocial stress, income inequality, and social disintegration: four of the five pathways identified by Cornia et al. (this volume) linking social conditions with mortality. Stated in terms of a different but compatible conceptual framework, labor markets have powerful effects on social stratification, differential exposure (to hazards or risk factors), differential vulnerability, and differential consequences (e.g., of illness): the four generic mechanisms identified by Diderichsen, Evans, & Whitehead (2001) as contributing to social disparities in health. A sanguine view is that labor-market opportunities presented by globalization offer the potential for improving social determinants of health (SDH) by reducing poverty and inequality and improving living standards in a way that is possible only through higher incomes. There are reasons to accept this proposition in some country contexts, but for many of the employed (and of course for the unemployed) it is only part of the story and largely irrelevant to their short-term situations. Notably, worldwide progress in poverty reduction as measured using the World Bank thresholds has been modest: although some countries (such as China and Viet Nam) have made impressive strides (Chen & Ravallion, 2007) poverty has (for instance) increased substantially in sub-Saharan Africa (Chen & Ravallion, 2007) and remained stubbornly high in south Asia (Felipe & Hasan, 2005).

With respect to labor markets as in other areas, generalizations about globalization's impacts are precarious and the relevant research literature is huge. This chapter identifies a number of broad trends, and then describes some generic policy implications for advocates for health equity regardless of their institutional location, national and subnational governments, and multilateral institutions for global governance (on these last see Chapter 12, this volume). The analysis presented here does not and cannot substitute for historically informed study of specific countries, specific sectors of national economies, and the production networks that are characteristic of specific industries.

NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION(S) OF LABOR

A detailed study published in 1977 described a "new international division of labor" exemplified by the relocation of labor-intensive production in the textile and garment industries to sites in the developing world selected on the basis of low wages and minimal protections for workers. These sites were usually in export processing zones (EPZs) established by national governments, offering relaxed or nonexistent regulation of wages and working

conditions as well as other incentives to investors in production for export (Fröbel, Heinrichs, & Kreye, 1980). According to the ILO, as of 2007 more than 66 million workers were employed in 3,500 EPZs worldwide, as compared with 845 EPZs and 22.5 million workers a decade earlier. Of these, approximately 40 million workers are in China, more than five million in Central America and Mexico, and 3.2 million in bonded factories in Bangladesh (Boyenge, 2007).

The international division of labor has both deepened and become more complicated in the course of a global reorganization of production across multiple national borders (Dicken, 2007). Many industries are now characterized by global commodity or value chains (the terms are used here interchangeably), in which multiple discrete elements of the production process are located where returns can be maximized and risks minimized (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz, 1994; Kaplinsky, 2004; Schrank, 2004; Bair, 2005). In the words of two leading researchers on commodity chains: “Globalization entails uneven development for firms and workers both within and across regions and nations, and viewing the process through the lens of the commodity chains framework contributes to our understanding of who wins and who loses, and why” (Bair & Gereffi, 2003, p. 165). In many instances, production networks and intrafirm trade that involve multiple subsidiaries of a transnational corporation (TNC) are being supplemented or replaced by contractual relationships with external suppliers and service providers (“outsourcing”), with the latter expanding rapidly in importance (Milberg, 2004; Edwards, 2004). These suppliers are often in direct competition with one another. It may be useful to think of this as the Nike model, after the athletic shoe firm (which actually owns almost no factories) that pioneered it (Donaghu & Barff, 1990; Rothenberg-Aalami, 2004). The case of Nike is an early example of a “buyer-driven” commodity chain: one in which the control exercised by brand-name manufacturers or retail chains (such as the supermarkets that dominate many segments of the global agri-food system; see Chapter 10, this volume) enables them to capture much of the value added in the production process, while exercising relentless pressure on producers farther down the chain to cut costs and shifting production among contractors and jurisdictions where profitable. The ability of Wal-Mart to do this in the retail sector is particularly noteworthy because of its sheer size (*Economist*, 2004; Appelbaum & Lichtenstein, 2006).

The distribution of globalization’s gains and losses often depends on the niches that individual workers and firms are able to carve out in global value chains. Recent case studies applying commodity chain analysis to industries such as horticulture, textile manufacturing, and garment production in Kenya, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Vietnam (Nadvi, 2004; Jenkins, 2005) found that substantial opportunities for employment and income gains for some workers, although not all, were associated with integration into global value chains and the resulting access to export markets. Conversely: “Global value chain pressures are . . . associated with

increasing casualization of labor and excessive hours of work” (Nadvi, 2004, p. 25). These pressures are familiar from studies of the footwear and clothing industries in many jurisdictions (e.g., Ross, 1997; Gereffi, Spener, & Bair, 2002). A case study of grape production in Brazil for northern supermarkets found that workers were able to achieve substantial gains in wages and working conditions because of their potential ability to disrupt the commodity chain, but the author admits that this finding is exceptional (Selwyn, 2007). Over the longer term, ability to capture gains from globalization is critically dependent on the ability of firms to move up the global value chain from component supply or assembly to become original equipment manufacturers or full-package producers and, ultimately, to develop their own brands (Arrunada & Vazquez, 2006; Tokatli, 2007); a process exemplified by some sectors of Asian manufacturing but also evident in other industries.

Gereffi and colleagues (Bair & Gereffi, 2002; Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003) are cautiously optimistic about the ability of manufacturers in textile and garment value chains to accomplish this, but they and others (e.g., Kaplinsky, 2004) emphasize that this is by no means certain and much depends on the structure of the particular value chain—a variable that may be outside the control of developing country firms or governments. A more pessimistic view is exemplified by a study of the Caribbean basin’s emergence as a rival to Mexico for garment production: “While the manufacturers in my sample [from the Dominican Republic] hoped that full-package production would constitute an upgrading strategy, they increasingly view it as a survival strategy” (Schrank, 2004, p. 138); even full-package producers are facing intensive labor-cost competition (Schrank, 2004, p. 140). In the case of Mexico’s *maquiladora* sector, which originated with the establishment of EPZs, cost containment by way of falling wages and deteriorating working conditions for many manufacturing workers (Alarcón-González & McKinley, 1999; Fussell, 2000; Cypher, 2001, 2004; Frey, 2003; Martínez, 2004) has failed to avoid the recent loss of an estimated 200,000 export production jobs to China. Weight is lent to the pessimistic view by such factors as the impact on employment of financial crises resulting from rapid disinvestment (see Chapter 5, this volume): such crises have resulted in the loss of millions of jobs in the formal sector, and employment tends to recover more slowly than gross domestic product (GDP) in the aftermath (van der Hoeven & Lübker, 2005). Writing mainly about sub-Saharan Africa, Collier makes a further point about the constraints on strategies of export-led development through integration into global value chains, even at the bottom. Asia, he points out, began industrializing without competition from other low-wage manufacturers, and with “a wage advantage over the existing competition (in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] countries) of around forty-to-one.” However, because of the global reorganization of production, countries seeking to pursue a similar strategy today have no wage advantage over Asian manufacturers, which

still rely in part on low labor costs as a source of comparative advantage (Collier, 2006, p. 1437).

GLOBAL LABOR MARKETS, “FLEXIBILIZATION,” AND THE CHINA SYNDROME

The increasing importance of global commodity chains instantiates the gradual emergence of a genuinely global labor market (World Bank, 1995). Other things being equal, globalization tends to increase inequalities between “skilled” and “unskilled” workers, both within national economies and across national borders (see, e.g., Rama, 2003, pp. 169–71; Somavia, 2006). In industrialized countries, perhaps the most conspicuous manifestation of this phenomenon has been a precipitous drop in the demand for, and the labor incomes of, “unskilled” workers (Nickell & Bell, 1995; Wood, 1998).⁴ Much debate among economists has surrounded the relative contributions of globalization (sometimes, although not always, equated with openness to trade) and technological change (for a review, see Chusseau, Dumont, & Hellier, 2008). The emerging consensus is that the answer is “both,” with the specific contributions depending on the country or regional context (International Monetary Fund, 2007, p. 179). Indeed, it would seem analytically difficult to distinguish these relative contributions, as noted in a *Business Week* feature on the job losses associated with corporate downsizing in the 1990s: “A global economy, rousting American employers from business-as-usual management, demands such change; rapidly evolving technology allows it” (Hammonds, Kelly, & Thurston, 1994, p. 77). Recognizing this point, the World Bank now identifies technological diffusion as one of the four channels of globalization (World Bank, 2007).

Meanwhile, inflation-adjusted manufacturing wages adjusted for differences in purchasing power in some Asian economies (most notably South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand), but *not* in Latin America, have risen toward US levels between 1970 and 2000 (International Monetary Fund, 2007, p. 172). Manufacturing employment is only a small proportion (and especially in the high-income countries a declining proportion) of total employment, so almost nothing can be inferred about overall labor income patterns from this figure. Meanwhile, in some, although not all, high-income countries, rising inequality in market incomes is being driven by increases at the very top of the income scale, among those described as the working rich by Duménil & Lévy (2004).⁵ A similar pattern is now emerging in India (Felipe & Hasan, 2005, p. 24). In Canada and the United States, even when one descends from the commanding heights of the income pyramid, a strong tendency exists for disparities in labor income to widen because of growth near the top of the distribution, and stagnation or decline elsewhere (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2007; Yalnizyan, 2007). This divergence is at least partly explained by the fact that in rich and poor countries alike,

the working poor are normally price-takers in labor markets (Cormier & Craypo, 2000); what they have to offer is in abundant supply relative to the demand. During certain historical periods, this disadvantage has been offset by the ability to organize and bargain collectively. As shown later in the chapter, many aspects of globalization neutralize or undermine this ability. Meanwhile, globalization provides new opportunities for those labor-market participants with highly marketable skills (“human capital”), often acquired through advanced education, the financial cost of which creates a formidable barrier to entry. This segment of the labor market is characterized not by competition among workers for jobs but rather by competition among employers for talent that can move with relative ease across national borders, at least within multinational organizations.

Global economic integration and the expansion of the global labor force are almost certainly combining to generate increased pressures for labor-market “flexibility,” with negative effects on economic security for many workers. International relations scholar Robert Cox (1999) argues that globalization leads to a division among integrated, precarious, and excluded forms of employment—a typology that is valuable because it focuses on the character of the employment relationship, rather than its geographical situation within production networks that are often in continuous flux. Within the industrialized world, Cox’s typology is validated by research on US corporate downsizing in the 1990s, and the associated rise in temporary or contractual employment relationships (Hammonds et al., 1994; Uchitelle et al., 1996; DiTomaso, 2001). For example, General Motors replaced factory workers in Detroit with home-based workers in two towns in the US Midwest, who earned far lower wages and minimal benefits doing piecework (Gringeri, 1994). More recently, firms in the southern United States are finding a source of competitive advantage in the low-wage and almost infinitely flexible labor of Latino immigrants (Smith & Winders, 2008). In Latin America the typology is validated by 1997 survey data from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela showing that “the occupational structure has become the foundation for an unyielding and stable polarization of income,” with lower-income personal service, agricultural, commercial, and industrial workers making up 74 percent of the working population; an intermediate stratum of technicians and administrative employees 14 per cent; and higher-income professionals, employers, and managers just 9 per cent (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2000, pp. 61–91; for a similar analysis of South Africa, see Webster, 2005). Although the connections with globalization will vary among countries and regions, interpretation of these data by the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) links “the need to participate competitively in the world economy” to labor-market deregulation, increased flexibility, and the growth of economic insecurity (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2000, pp. 93–102). Labor markets are clearly

contributing to levels of income inequality that, in many Asian economies, are rising toward Latin America's, despite what appears to be widespread underreporting of labor incomes by higher-income households in Asian surveys (Development Indicators and Policy Research Division, 2007).

Globalization's impact on labor-market incomes will almost certainly be increased as integration of India, China, and the transition economies into the global economy roughly doubles the global labor force relative to its size before 1990 (Freeman, 2007). The research literature offers conflicting interpretations of the effects. Some commentators argue that it will exert long-term worldwide downward pressure on wages, indeed is already doing so (Woodall, 2006; Freeman, 2007). An alternative perspective is that wage inflation in economies like China's, which is already being observed among certain categories of workers, "will create space for low-income countries to move into the lowest-skill activities vacated by producers in the large emerging countries" (World Bank, 2007, p. 102). Arguably, this is already happening, as evidenced by the shift of manufacturing employment from Mexico to China and the emergence of Viet Nam as a lower-cost alternative to China for the location of manufacturing operations (York, 2005; Bradsher, 2008). However, in the former case at least, it is far from clear that Mexican producers have actually "vacated" the field of so-called low-skill activities by moving up the value chain; many Mexican workers may simply be priced out of the relevant global labor markets (Parrado, 2005).

The World Bank's 2007 *Global Economic Prospects* report predicted that labor-market trends will fuel the expansion of a global middle class, yet at the same time anticipated that labor market effects of globalization will increase economic inequality in countries accounting for 86 per cent of the developing world's population over the period until 2030, with the "unskilled poor" being left farther behind (World Bank, 2007, pp. 67–100). This is almost certainly an understatement of the true increase in economic inequality that can be anticipated over the period in question, since the World Bank does not consider the potential impact of shifts in the distribution of income from labor to capital, within and across national borders. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has described a clear decline in labor's share of national income in the high-income countries since the early 1980s as a consequence of globalization (International Monetary Fund, 2007, pp. 166–69). Between the early 1980s and 2006, corporate profits in the G7 countries rose from just over 11 per cent of national income to 15.5 percent (Woodall, 2006, pp. 6–7) while real labor incomes for most workers have flatlined or declined. Outside the industrialized world in Mexico, the proportion of GDP going to wages fell from 40 per cent in 1976 to 18.9 per cent in 2000, during a period of rapid integration into the global economy and two major economic crises (Palma, 2006, pp. 15–16). The Mexican case is perhaps extreme, but it is what one might expect given the increasing mobility, and therefore bargaining power, of capital relative to most forms of labor.

GENDER AND INFORMALIZATION

As with other aspects of macroeconomic policy (Elson & Cagatay, 2000), men and women experience globalization's effects on labor markets differently. In general, globalization has been accompanied by the reproduction of gender hierarchies (Mills, 2003) in which women tend to occupy lower paid, less desirable, and less secure jobs. In some cases globalization has led to economic gains and social empowerment for women, for instance, by creating new employment opportunities in export-oriented industries. "The reality is that, for many women, working in exports is better than the alternatives of working (or being unemployed) in the domestic economy" (Barrientos, Kabeer, & Hossain, 2004, p. 2; see also Kabeer, 2004a, 2004b; Chen, Vanek, Lund, & Heintz, 2005). A comparative study of export-oriented employment and social policy in South Korea, China, Mexico, Mauritius, South Africa, and India, where economic policies have supported expansion of export employment (often in EPZs), identified economic gains for women in terms both of labor incomes and of work-related entitlement to benefits (Razavi, Pearson, & Danloy, 2004). However, these gains are disproportionately vulnerable both to economic crises and to systemic, globalization-related pressures for "labor market 'flexibility' and fiscal restraint" (Razavi & Pearson, 2004, p. 25). It is important, as well, to consider the difference between situations in which the emergence of new forms of employment creates opportunities for women, and situations in which women have no alternative but to take jobs in export production because of declining real wages, rising economic insecurity, and new financial demands on the household in the form, for instance, of user fees for health care and children's education (Shaw, 2007; Razavi, 2007). The health effects of the work itself are another issue: women in Bangladesh, for instance, "do not necessarily expect to work in garment factories for a prolonged period. Indeed, given the toll taken on their health by long working hours, it would not be possible to undertake such work for an extended period of time" (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004, p. 151).

A further manifestation of gender hierarchy is the emergence of "global care chains" that are analogous to commodity chains in terms of their fragmentation of tasks as highly unequal distribution of benefits. The indispensable work in such global care chains is overwhelmingly done by women (Yeates, 2004, 2005). "The same processes that increase cross-border supply through the disembodied export of labor in EPZs or outsourcing of information technology service work also promote the embodied supply of care work through transnational migration" (Summerfield, Pyle, & Desai, 2006, p. 281; see also Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Misra, Woodring, & Merz, 2006; Pyle, 2006b), often with highly destructive effects on the health of female migrants and their own families (Pyle, 2006a). The extreme example is what appears to be an expanding, and increasingly lucrative, trade in trafficked sex workers (Hughes, 2000; Drevland, 2004).

Sassen makes a strong case that, whether or not it is coerced in a sense recognizable to television viewers, such migration instantiates a “survival circuit” driven not only by “the deepening misery of the global south” but also by the pull factor of an expanding demand for low-wage work in the “global cities” that are the command centers of the world economy (Sassen, 2002; for background see Sassen, 2006). The jobs in question involve not only care work, but also such activities as changing hotel linens, preparing and serving restaurant meals, and cleaning office buildings and airports for globalization’s winners (Winerip, 1998; Herod & Aguilar, 2006; McDowell, Batnitzky, & Dyer, 2008).

Discussion of globalization and labor markets often concentrates on employment in the formal, waged economy. However, in many low- and middle-income labor markets the majority of the working population derives its livelihood in other ways (Garcia, 2004; Chen, Vanek, & Heintz, 2006). In India, for example, 92 per cent of workers are engaged in informal employment, either self-employed or in waged employment but without contracts or social protection (Chen et al., 2006; see also Unni & Rani, 2003; Lerche, 2007). In the developing world as a whole, “fully 50 to 80 per cent of non-agricultural employment is informal” (Chen et al., 2005, p. 8). “Growing labor market informalization amounts to a regressive process of redistribution” (Benería & Floro, 2005, p. 12) driven by competition to lower production costs through labor-market flexibility, by financial crises (as noted earlier), and by import liberalization that wipes out livelihoods in formerly protected sectors. Far from disappearing as part of the process of modernization, informal work is increasing in importance; the boundaries between formal and informal sectors are blurring, especially at the “bottom end” of global commodity chains; and policies adopted by national governments in order to accelerate integration into the global economy often actively encourage informalization (Lund & Nicholson, 2003; Kudva & Benería, 2005; Benería & Floro, 2005). In most regions of the world, gender hierarchies in labor markets extend to the informal sector: women are disproportionately likely to engage in informal employment, disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of structural economic changes such as financial crises that drive people into the informal economy, and, within the informal sector, likely to have lower wages and less legal and social protection.

Meanwhile, and crucially, women in countries rich and poor alike continue to bear most of the burden of unpaid care work in the household. A review of gender dimensions of the globalization of production carried out for the ILO concluded: “The single most important factor which acts as a barrier to women’s ability to participate as full economic actors in the global economy is their domestic responsibilities, and for a large subgroup, their childcare responsibilities. The childcare constraint appears to operate across contexts which are otherwise very different” (Barrientos et al., 2004, p. 13). This conclusion is supported by other research, notably Heymann’s findings from surveys of 55,000 households and more than 1,000 in-depth

interviews in eight countries (Heymann, 2006). Admittedly, improving women's ability to participate in the labor market will not eliminate gender hierarchies, and the issue may not be one of "participation" in the global economy but rather one of how gender hierarchies structure the terms of that participation (see, e.g., Buechler, 2002; Sassen, 2002). It is therefore best to view policies that address the domestic labor/childcare constraint as necessary but by no means sufficient conditions for reducing gender inequities in access to work in the formal economy and the associated benefits.

GLOBALIZATION AND LABOR STANDARDS

Findings that seemingly contradict the analysis so far presented emerge from a series of cross-national comparative studies by Neumayer and De Soysa, who considered the relation between globalization and compliance with the core labor standards set out in the ILO's 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: freedom of association and collective bargaining, abolition of child labor, elimination of forced or compulsory labor, and elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation.⁶ These studies generally failed to find negative effects of global economic integration, as measured by openness to trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Neumayer & De Soysa, 2005, 2006, 2007). Openness to trade was in fact associated with higher respect for women's economic rights, a lower prevalence of forced labor (Neumayer & De Soysa, 2007), and higher respect for free association and collective bargaining (Neumayer & De Soysa, 2006); higher levels of FDI were associated with lower prevalence of child labor (Neumayer & De Soysa, 2005); and no statistical support was found for the "race to the bottom" hypothesis that globalization leads to a lowering of labor standards. At the same time, the authors are emphatic about the limited inferences with respect to causation that can be drawn from their findings, *and* that the findings cannot be used to infer that globalization is beneficial in terms of labor outcomes as distinct from process-related variables such as free association and collective bargaining. According to Neumayer and De Soysa: "It is entirely possible, of course, perhaps even likely, that globalization boosts the bargaining power of capital at the expense of labor, which would put downward pressure on outcome-related labor standards such as wages, working times and other employment conditions. . . ." (2007, p. 1532).

A similar caveat applies to another cross-national study of the relation between FDI and respect for collective labor rights in ninety developing countries between 1986 and 2002. The study found a positive correlation between FDI inflows and respect for labor rights, but (unlike the Neumayer and De Soysa study) partial support for the race-to-the-bottom hypothesis with respect to trade liberalization. It also found a positive regional effect stronger than the effects of either FDI or trade: in other words, the level

of respect for labor rights tends to be similar among developing countries in the same region (Mosley & Uno, 2007). This is what one might expect given the regional rather than truly global character of competition for investment and production in many commodity chains. The study's value is limited inter alia by a scoring system in which multiple violations of labor standards of any given type count as a single violation. The authors themselves note multiple data limitations and the need for more specific descriptions of how individual nations are integrated into the world economy. Finally, none of the studies addresses the possibility that neither the ILO's core labor standards nor other labor-market policy initiatives will be sufficient in many contexts to counter the "disequalizing" (Birdsall, 2006, p. 8) dynamic of the global labor market.

Cross-national studies of labor-market outcomes, notably Rudra's (2005) study of manufacturing in 59 developing countries between 1972 and 1997, and a number of country- and region-specific studies lend support to this last hypothesis (see also Rama, 2003, pp. 169–71). Globalization in South Korea, and in particular the effects of the 1997–98 financial crisis, led to intensification of union activity and an eventual increase in labor's bargaining power and associated rapid expansion of labor rights and social-protection programs (Kim & Kim, 2003; Lee, 2004). Another observer (Kong, 2005) notes a similar pattern of labor-market reform in Taiwan, but emphasizes that Taiwan and Korea have accommodated neoliberalism rather than challenging it,⁷ and wonders whether the experience of either country is widely generalizable.⁸ As noted earlier, whatever policy shifts have taken place have not halted the rise of economic inequality in many Asian economies. It has been observed that prolabor changes to labor law in Latin America, even when they were belatedly accompanied by an increase in resources directed to enforcement, failed to offset the difficulties for labor mobilization created by globalization—notably the outsourcing, pressures for flexibility and fragmentation of production characteristic of global commodity chains (Anner, 2007, 2008; Hershberg, 2007). As a result, the percentage of workers represented by a union has been falling sharply even in manufacturing—as in the high-income countries, at least according to Lee (2005), as a consequence of the reorganization of industrial production. Furthermore, the "regime of flexible labor . . . operates in stark tension with the traditional model of labor as a solidaristic collective actor" (Hershberg, 2007, p. 170).⁹ Similarly, union effectiveness and formal employment have declined, and privatization has proceeded apace, even in African countries like Mozambique, Zambia, and South Africa with historical legacies of trade union action (Pitcher, 2007). This is far from an exhaustive review, but it does suggest the extent to which labor-market outcomes that undermine social determinants of health originate with basic "asymmetries" in the global economic system, as outlined in the introductory chapter to this volume, and will be highly resistant to policy intervention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

If it is assumed that poverty, however measured, must be reduced as part of the process of reducing health inequities, then labor-market issues must be central to any analysis of globalization's effects on the social determinants of health, and must be explicitly addressed in development and health policy alike. Yet employment is not high on the international agenda for poverty reduction. Notably, employment is neither a target nor an indicator under the first Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. It is necessary to "bring employment back in" as a central concern of economic and development policy. In many cases, this will require challenging elements of the international economic policy environment that lead even governments that are rhetorically concerned with equity and poverty reduction to pursue policies that lead to "dismal development and excellent macroeconomic outcomes," in the words of one observer of South Africa (Streak, 2004). These pressures include not only lender conditionalities, such as the IMF's insistence on primary budget surpluses and very low inflation rates even at the cost of growth, but also threats of disinvestment and capital flight (see Chapter 5, this volume). The former constraint is more readily amenable to policy intervention than the latter. "[T]he case for locking capital down" (Bond, 2001, ch.12) is intuitively compelling, but a country adopting this approach risks the destructive consequences of isolating itself in a world of global production networks and competition for FDI.¹⁰

There are, however, policy instruments that can be used to shift the balance in favor of labor market outcomes that are more favorable from an equity perspective. One of these is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) process that national governments must undertake as a precondition for debt relief under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (see Chapter 7, this volume) and for other forms of development assistance. The United Nations Development Fund for Women reported in 2005 that it had reviewed forty-one PRSPs (most of the ones that had then been prepared) and found that while 23 incorporated some form of employment indicator, the indicators might not be the most appropriate ones for the majority of nonagricultural workers in the informal economy and "only five . . . set any kind of explicit target for employment" (Chen et al., 2005, p. 20). Above and beyond employment targets, it is important explicitly to incorporate the interests and situations of the working poor in PRSPs. A related policy focus involves childcare. Crucially, in view of all that is known about how (lack of) access to childcare affects women's abilities to take advantage of labor-market opportunities, priority must be given to providing all women with access to childcare, free or at minimal cost. Depending on the country context, this can be achieved through an appropriate combination of labor standards (where applicable) and direct expenditure by national governments and development assistance providers. Childcare must, in turn, be just one element of a complex of interventions

aimed at improving women's access to employment in global production, as well as the *terms* of that access (Barrientos & Kabeer, 2004).

Another set of policy instruments derives from the ILO's set of core labor standards, referenced earlier. The fact that these standards, at least according to Alston (2004), represent a retreat from the more explicit focus on labor *rights* in the conventions from which the standards are drawn is probably less important than the fact that disregard for the standards remains widespread. Many countries have only a limited incentive to ensure compliance—and indeed, a strong incentive not to do so in cases where their competitors for markets and investment cannot be relied upon to comply. At the same time, proposals to internationalize the implementation of labor standards are contentious: Basu (2005), for instance, warns darkly against “wanton interventionism.” Based partly on her field research in Bangladesh's export-oriented garment industry, Kabeer (2004b, p. 12) argues eloquently that linking labor standards to market access by way of “social clauses” in trade agreements may in fact hurt precisely those workers they are purportedly designed to help, penalizing poor workers “for their poverty or for the poverty of their country.” Broadly similar claims about the adverse consequences of linking market access to labor standards have been made with respect to child labor (Cigno, Rosati, & Guarcello, 2006).

A separate claim has to do with the purported ineffectiveness of labor standards, for instance in reducing inequality (Rama, 2003). However, the data set used by Rama in the cited study makes no distinction between ratification of ILO conventions and their effective implementation. His conclusion that the standards embodied in such conventions do little or nothing to reduce inequality, while the “traditional instruments of social protection” do, must be treated with caution, although it certainly supports the more extensive and equity-focused use of those instruments (see Chapter 6, this volume). Similarly, Kabeer (2004b, p. 5) argues that “the spirit of global solidarity,” which she acknowledges as a motivation for proposing such clauses, “would be better served if the international labor movement were to campaign for a universal social floor that would protect the basic needs of all citizens, regardless of their labor market status.”

Social floors and labor standards are not mutually exclusive, and it is likely that “[t]he debate on linkage [of trade policy with labor standards] has been overly narrow due to a lack of institutional imagination” (Barry & Reddy, 2006, p. 627). In a detailed reply to the objections just cited and others, Barry and Reddy concede that the unilateral imposition of labor standards (through, e.g., trade sanctions) is illegitimate, but argue (a) that linkage of market access with labor standards following a system of fair negotiation among countries is legitimate, and (b) that it is administratively feasible to design an institutional framework involving the World Trade Organization (WTO)¹¹ that would overcome objections having to do with feasibility and effectiveness. To be both legitimate and feasible, such a framework would *inter alia* guard against opportunistic use of labor standards as a protectionist

strategy by high-income countries, and incorporate mechanisms whereby the rich countries would share the burdens imposed on poor ones by compliance with core labor standards. Space does not permit adequate treatment either of the richness of their argument or of objections rooted in political economy, specifically the likelihood that elites in developing countries would have a great deal to lose from such a mechanism and would resist efforts to build political support domestically (see, for example, Wise & Cypher, 2007). It suffices to say that their argument is strong enough to support renewed attention to such linkages based on their potential contribution to reducing health inequity through labor markets.

Debates about these and other policy directions are usefully understood with reference to the values underpinning two distinct, although not mutually exclusive, approaches to labor markets and their effects. One approach treats the primary objective of intervening in labor markets, directly or indirectly (e.g., in the form of public spending on education), as correcting for market failures. This approach is exemplified by recent World Bank inventories (World Bank, 2005, pp. 186–93; World Bank, 2007, pp. 125–33) of measures that national and subnational governments can take to make labor markets function more equitably. Although these inventories represent a useful starting point, they often state objectives too narrowly and neglect the potential importance of equity objectives apart from considerations of market failure. In other words, the objectives might be important and demand policy attention even if markets were functioning perfectly.

A second approach explicitly incorporates equity objectives and views labor-market policies as part of a much larger set of interventions directed at reducing inequalities in access to social determinants of health. This is, in fact, the approach implicitly adopted by the World Bank in its 2006 *World Development Report*, where (for instance) early childhood development programs, public expenditure on health care to improve equity in access to treatment, and public works programs to provide employment incomes are viewed in terms of their ability to improve human capacities (World Bank, 2005, pp. 132–55). Viewing labor-market and social-protection policies as complementary parts of a whole is especially important, for instance, with respect to the large numbers of workers in the informal sector. Providing effective social protection for such workers—who, as noted earlier, comprise a majority of the working population in some developing countries and tend to be disproportionately female—represents a formidable challenge even for well-intentioned governments, and also for organized labor (Gallin, 2001).

CODA: WHAT ROLE FOR THE HEALTH POLICY COMMUNITY?

The influence of labor markets on SDH is typical of a class of policy challenges that are big, untidy, complicated, largely outside the remit (and

often beyond the professional competence) of health ministries, yet must be addressed in order to achieve widely shared and equitable improvements in population health. Health ministries, health professionals, and agencies with a health mandate must become engaged in the relevant policy debates. This is a challenge in itself, and at the national level requires confronting the “unequal structure of representation” (Mahon, 1977) within state institutions, where health is often marginalized relative to concerns like providing a favorable investment climate. Globalization generates a variety of pressures to make those concerns even more central to policy and the intrastate distribution of power and resources (Cerny, 2000). A further obstacle is presented by domestic elites that may have an interest in resisting the directly or indirectly redistributive effects of policies that improve SDH, and may be able either to block the emergence of decisive pluralities in support of those policies (in formally democratic jurisdictions) or exercise a veto in other ways, for example, by way of actual or anticipated capital flight. Although a satisfactory comparative exploration of the domestic politics of labor-market policy requires its own discussion, it should be noted that conflicts between labor and capital over economic distribution in today’s high-income countries, and in some others, were historically resolved by various forms of “social contracts” or class compromises delimited by national boundaries. The effect of globalization has been decisively to increase the ease with which capital (but not most workers) can take advantage of the “exit” option (see, e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

Even before these challenges are confronted, the health policy community must clearly understand how policies related (for instance) to labor markets influence health outcomes. Based on the amount of time I have spent, during thirty months’ involvement in the work of the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health, slowly and carefully explaining to various audiences how and why poverty is hazardous to health, this must be counted as a formidable task. It is formidable despite the strength of the evidence that poverty, and in particular the relation between poverty and other forms of social marginalization, wears people out in biologically measurable ways even in the richest societies in the world (Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, & Bound, 2006). Achieving a thorough understanding—preferably, visceral as well as intellectual—of these relations on the part of the health policy community is not a sufficient condition for the relevant policy changes, but it is most certainly a necessary one, and must be ranked as a top priority for all those concerned with such matters, critically including the World Health Organization itself.

NOTES

1. I am grateful for the research assistance of Daniel Poon.
2. For a detailed critique and a proposal for a (higher) poverty threshold more closely related to the cost of basic needs, see Woodward & Abdallah, 2008.

3. For example, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in the United States in 1911, in which 148 workers died, led to a public outcry and eventually to improved safety standards; similar fires occur with some frequency today in Bangladeshi garment factories (Brooks, 2007, p. 85). For additional examples and a detailed discussion of the relation between working conditions and health, see Employment Conditions Knowledge Network, 2007.
4. Although it is widely used in the literature, the distinction between skilled and unskilled workers is problematic for at least two reasons: (a) in conventional usage it does not appear to have any clear relation to the complexity of the tasks involved (an exception is Grossman & Rossi-Hansberg, 2006), and (b) it implicitly situates the locus of responsibility for declining wages and employability at the level of the individual, rather than directing attention to characteristics of the production system and the influences on those characteristics.
5. For discussions of labor income trends that reach similar conclusions, see also Kerstetter, 2002; Saez & Veall, 2005; Saez, 2005.
6. A useful introduction to these standards is provided by Asian Development Bank, 2006, and a critical review of their historical background by Alston, 2004.
7. Indeed, much Korean economic policy immediately post-1997 was driven by the requirements of IMF conditionalities (Crotty & Lee, 2005; Hundt, 2005; Moore, 2007, ch. 4).
8. It is also worthwhile to note that postdemocratization increases in labor activism in these two countries were preceded by a long period of authoritarian government during which capital accumulation was facilitated, in part, by ruthlessly repressive policies toward labor (see, e.g., Deyo, 1989; Amsden, 1990; Minns, 2006; Moore, 2007, ch. 3).
9. Veteran Belgian politician Frank Vandenbroucke suggests that a similar dynamic may be under way in high-income countries: "To the extent that skill has become more important as an explanatory factor of quite visible wage inequalities, such inequalities come to have a more 'biographical' character: they seem to be more related to personal history and qualifications than to class as traditionally understood" (Vandenbroucke, 1998, p. 47).
10. Cf. on this point the economic policy dilemma identified by Crotty, Epstein, & Kelly (1998, p. 121): "[P]rogressives often criticize FDI as a destructive force while at the same time decrying the fact that many poor countries can't seem to attract any. It may be that the only thing worse than engaging in this bidding war and getting FDI is engaging in it and not getting any."
11. And thereby reducing the potential for destructive free riding, since most of the world's economies are now WTO members.

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