

Women's economic
empowerment in the changing
world of work:
Reflections from South Asia

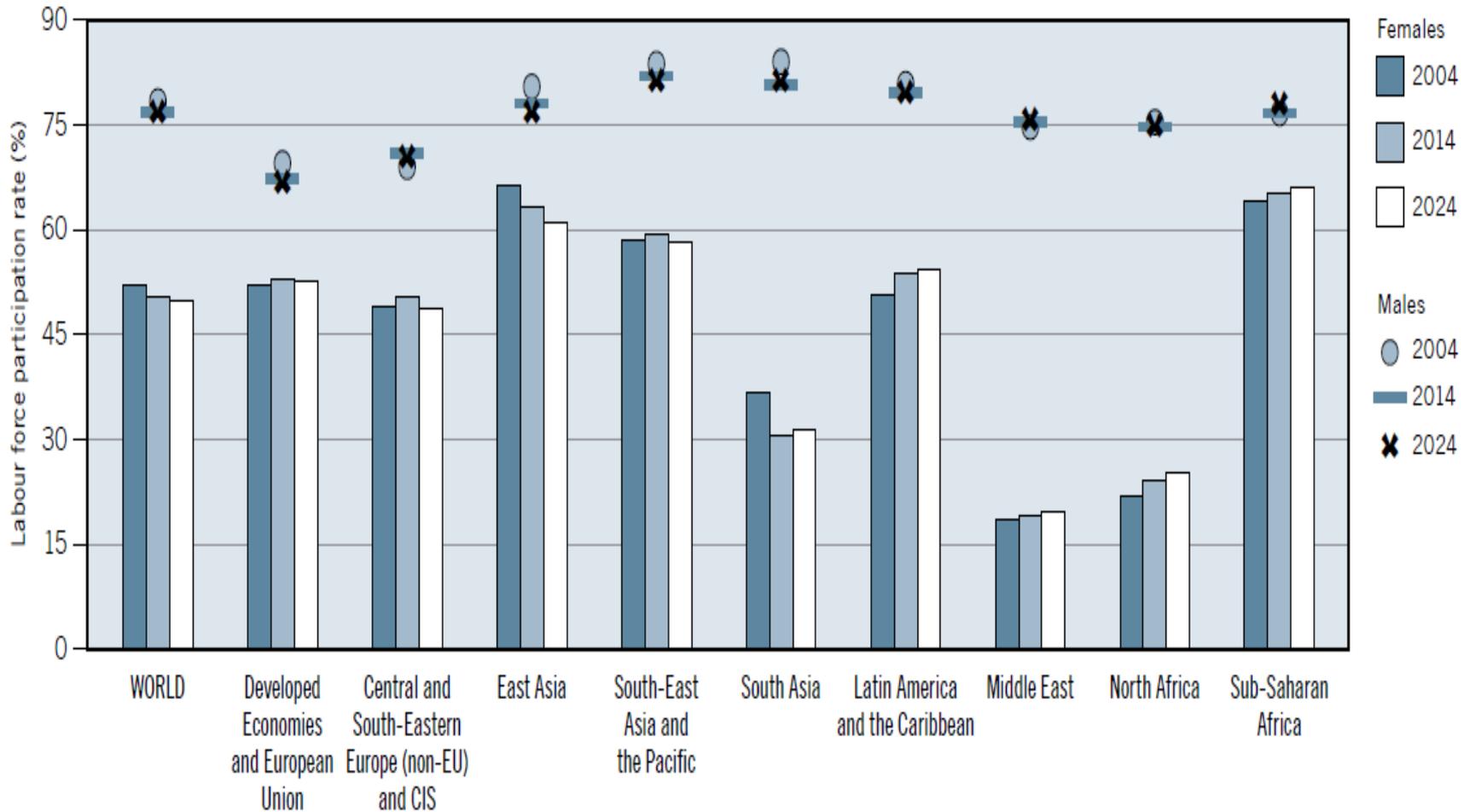
Jayati Ghosh

For UN-ESCAP Bangkok
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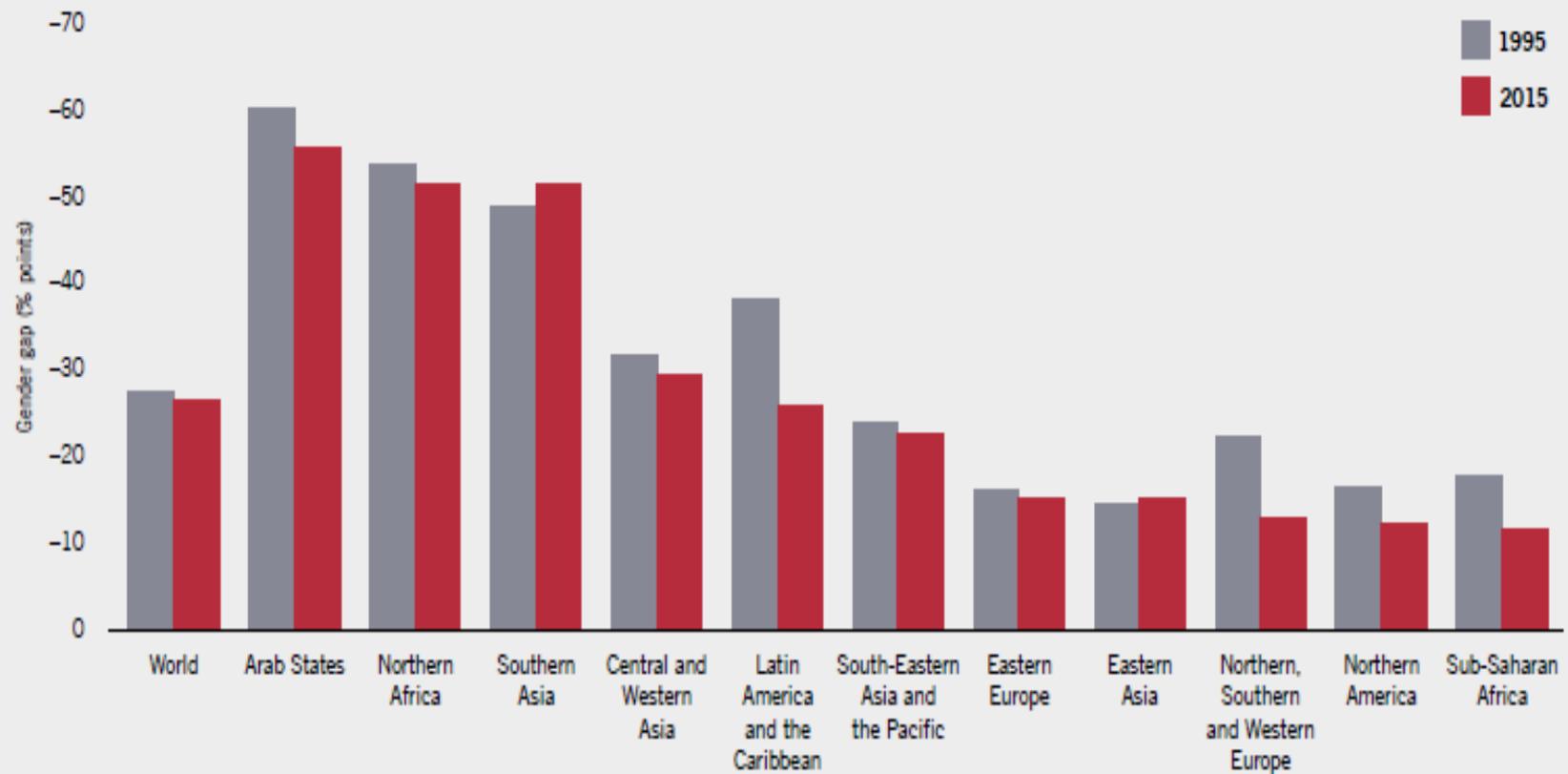
Gender discrimination has been crucial for growth in Asian region, but this is inadequately recognised

- Enables social reproduction of labour and provides unpaid labour in a range of activities, which subsidises recognised economic activity.
- Allows entry and exit of women from labour force based on life cycle and “culture”, which in turn expand or reduces labour supply.
- Creates segmented labour markets that provide cheaper labour as required, because of lower reservation wages of women workers.
- Provides social cushion that helps families and communities to tide over crises and deal with impacts of fiscal austerity and other economic shocks.

Labour force participation rates by gender, 2004, 2014 and 2024 projection (UN Women)



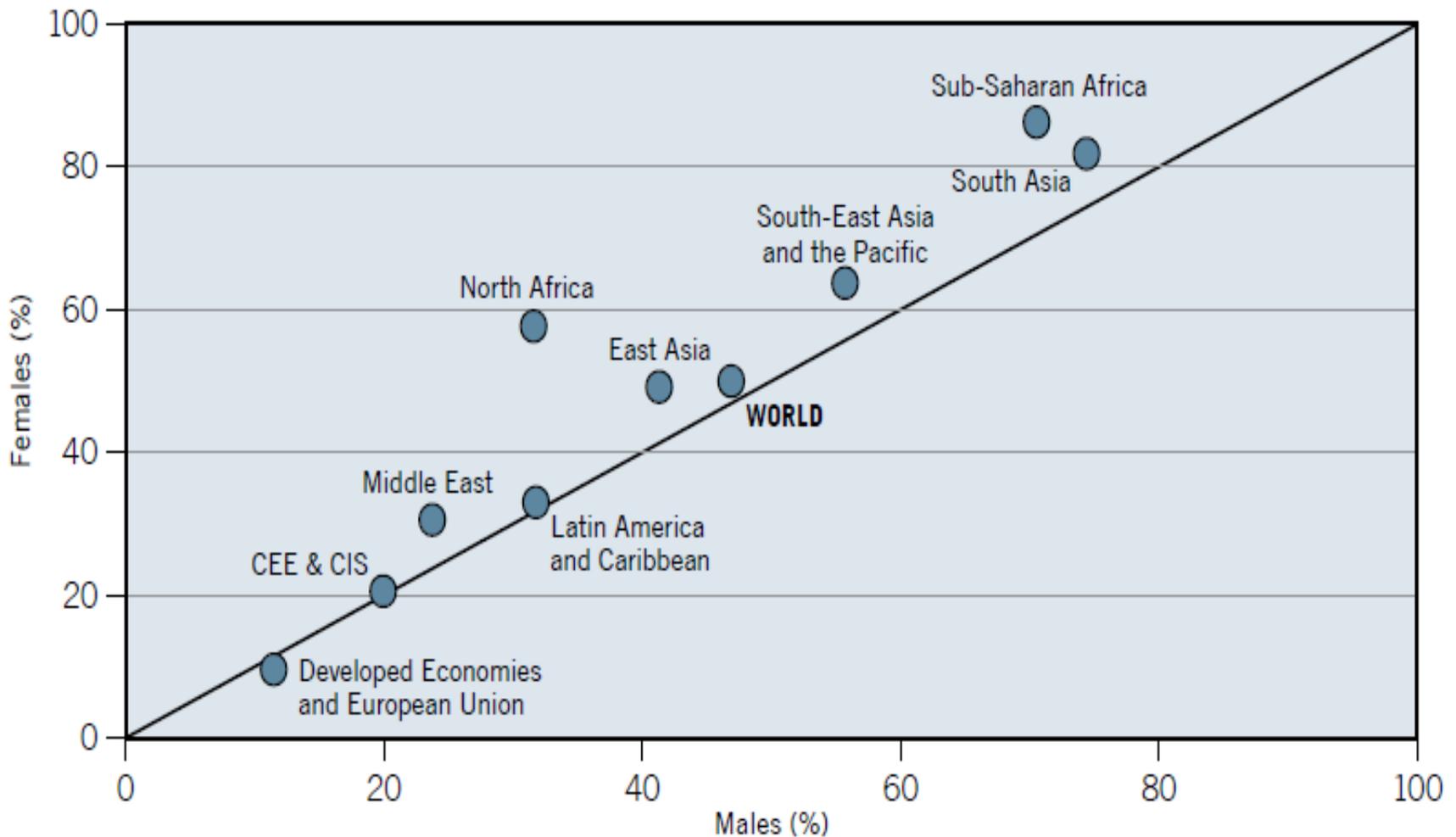
Gender gaps increasing in Southern and Eastern Asia: Gender gaps in labour force participation rates by region, 1995 and 2015



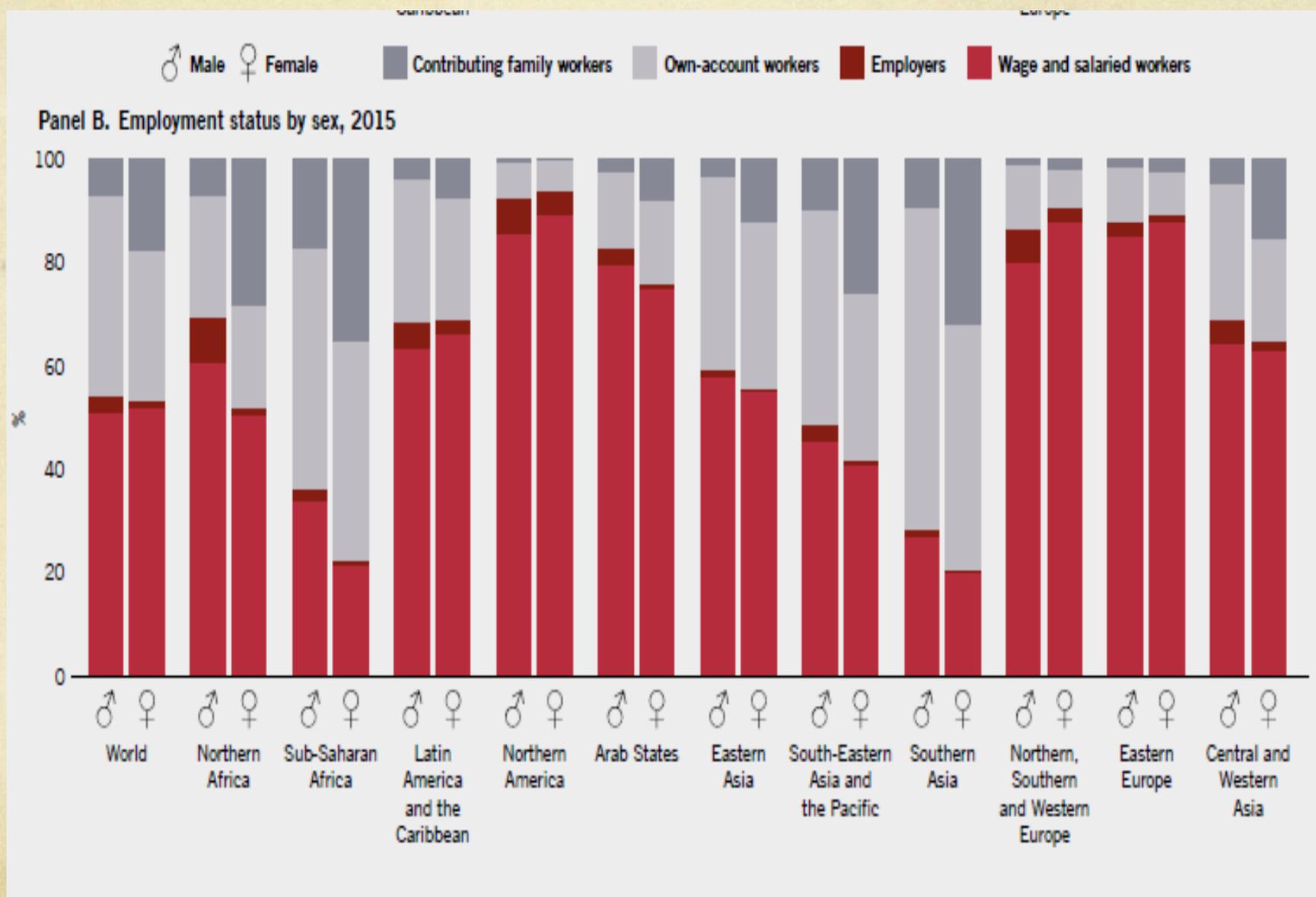
Note: The gender gap is measured as the difference between women and men labour force participation rates. The data cover 178 countries and the same countries are covered in figures 2, 3, 5, 6, 13, 14 and 16 of this report.

Source: ILO calculations based on ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, November 2015.

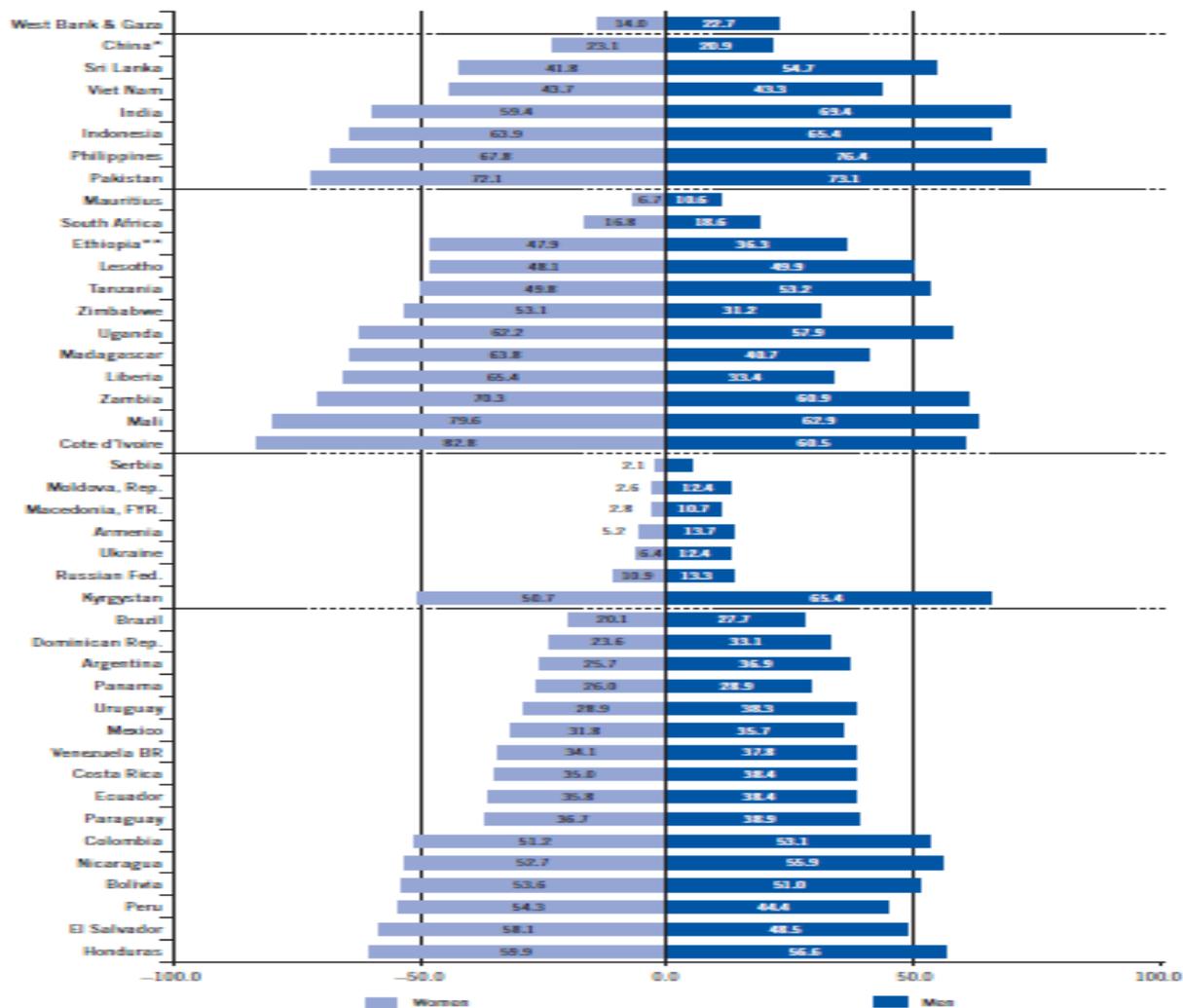
Women are more likely to be own account and contributing family workers



Employment Status by regions, 2015 (ILO)



Informal sector employment as per cent of total non-agricultural employment, by sex



Notes: Horizontal lines separate geographical regions. The countries are listed by ascending order of the indicator for women within each geographical region. *Six cities (see note in table 2.1).

South Asia's poor performance

- Very low women's work force participation rates overall (Sri Lanka and Bangladesh exceptions), further decreasing in recent times
- Wide gender gaps in pay
- Huge preponderance of informal work and contributing family work
- Strong reliance on unpaid work that feeds into other paid work issues in labour markets

But even this does not give us the true picture, because of problems with the definition of work

- Definitions of work and economic activity are not that simple
- Work is “any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use”. (19th ICLS Resolution 2013)
- Any activity that can potentially be delegated is economic activity, which leaves only personal consumption and leisure as non-economic activities.
- Conundrums: breastfeeding, surrogacy as examples.
- Recent definition of ILO is much more inclusive – but are national statistical systems following this?

Work defined in UN SNA 1993

- Workers are economically active persons, engaged in activities included within the boundary of production.
- The production boundary includes
 - production of all individual or collective goods or services that are supplied to units other than their producers, or intended to be so supplied, including the production of goods or services used up in the process of producing such goods or services;
 - own-account production of all goods that are retained by their producers for their own final consumption or gross capital formation;
 - own-account production of **housing** services by owner-occupiers and of domestic and personal services produced by employing paid domestic staff

Work defined in UN SNA 2008

- Restriction of economic production to activity carried out under the control and responsibility of an institutional unit that uses inputs of labour, capital, and goods and services to produce outputs of goods or services.
- So there must be an institutional unit that assumes responsibility for the process of production and owns any resulting goods or knowledge-capturing products or is entitled to be paid, or otherwise compensated, for the change-effecting or margin services provided.
- Activities undertaken by households that produce **services for their own use are excluded from the concept of production**, except for services provided by owner-occupied dwellings and services produced by employing paid domestic staff

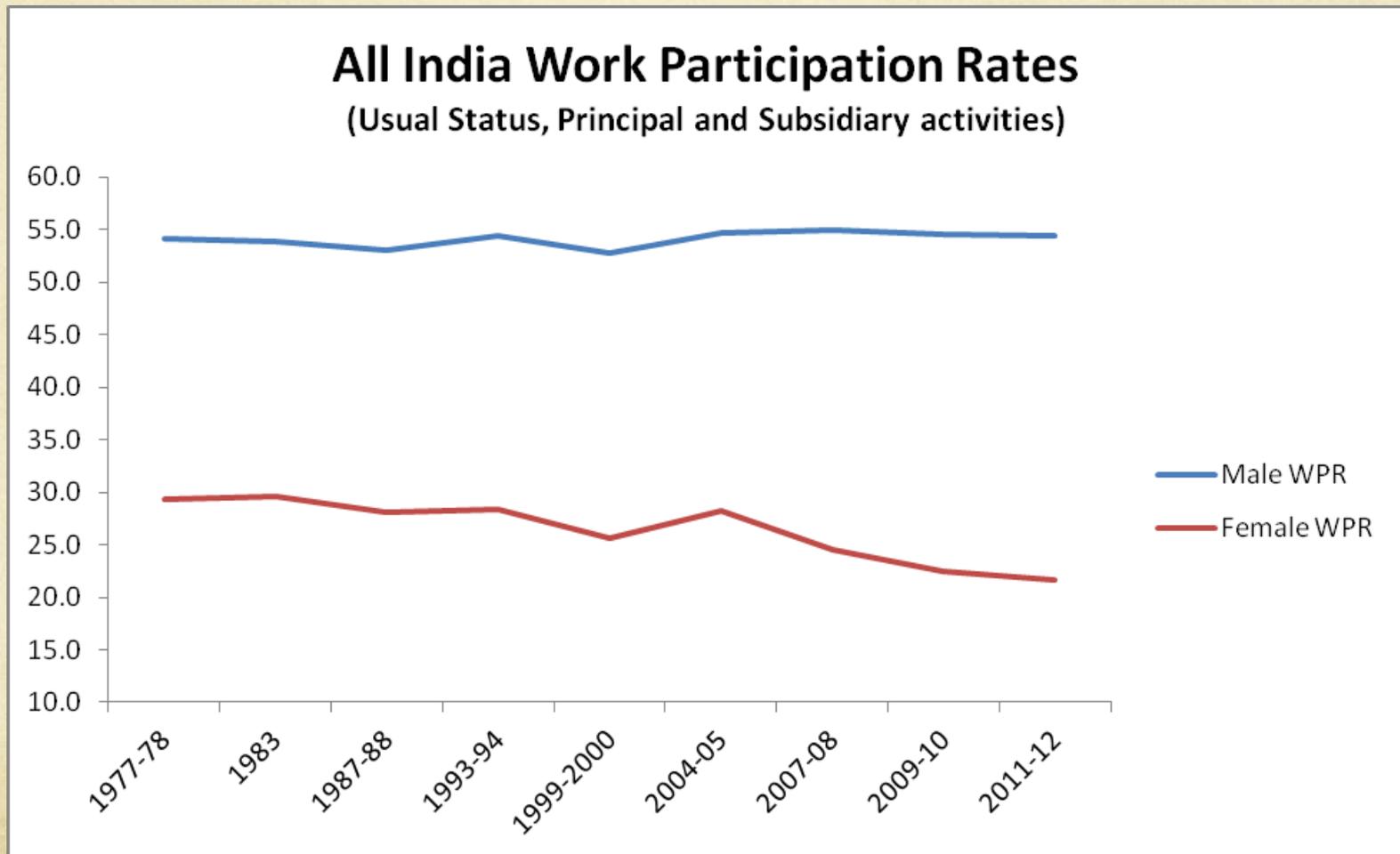
19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians breakthrough (Dec 2013)

- “Work comprises any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use.”
- Work is here defined irrespective of its formal or informal character or the legality of the activity, and can be performed by any unit.
- It excludes activities that do not involve producing goods or services (e.g. begging and stealing), self-care (e.g. personal grooming and hygiene) and activities that cannot be delegated (performed by another person on one’s own behalf, e.g. sleeping, learning and activities for own recreation).
- Employment – defined as “work for pay or profit” – therefore becomes a subset of work.

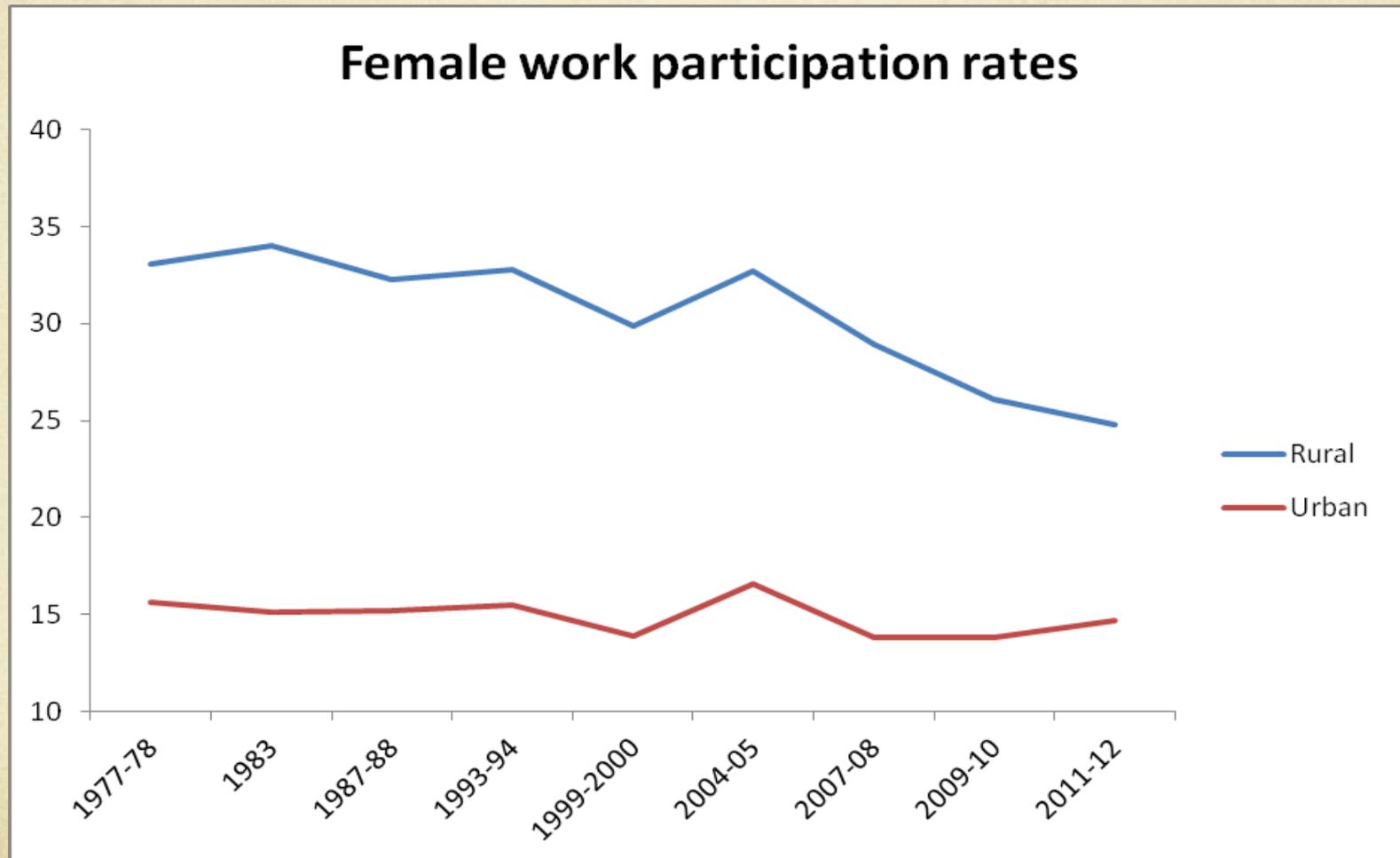
The Indian statistical system

- India has one of the one most sophisticated statistical systems in the developing world.
- Periodic (usually quinquennial but not always so) large sample surveys of the National Sample Survey Organisation provide detailed gender-disaggregated data on employment (both principal and subsidiary activity) in terms of usual status, current weekly status and current daily status.
- Attempt to introduce probing questions on women's activity.
- But even these data do not fully capture women's work or economic activity.

India has low and recently declining recognised work participation rates of women



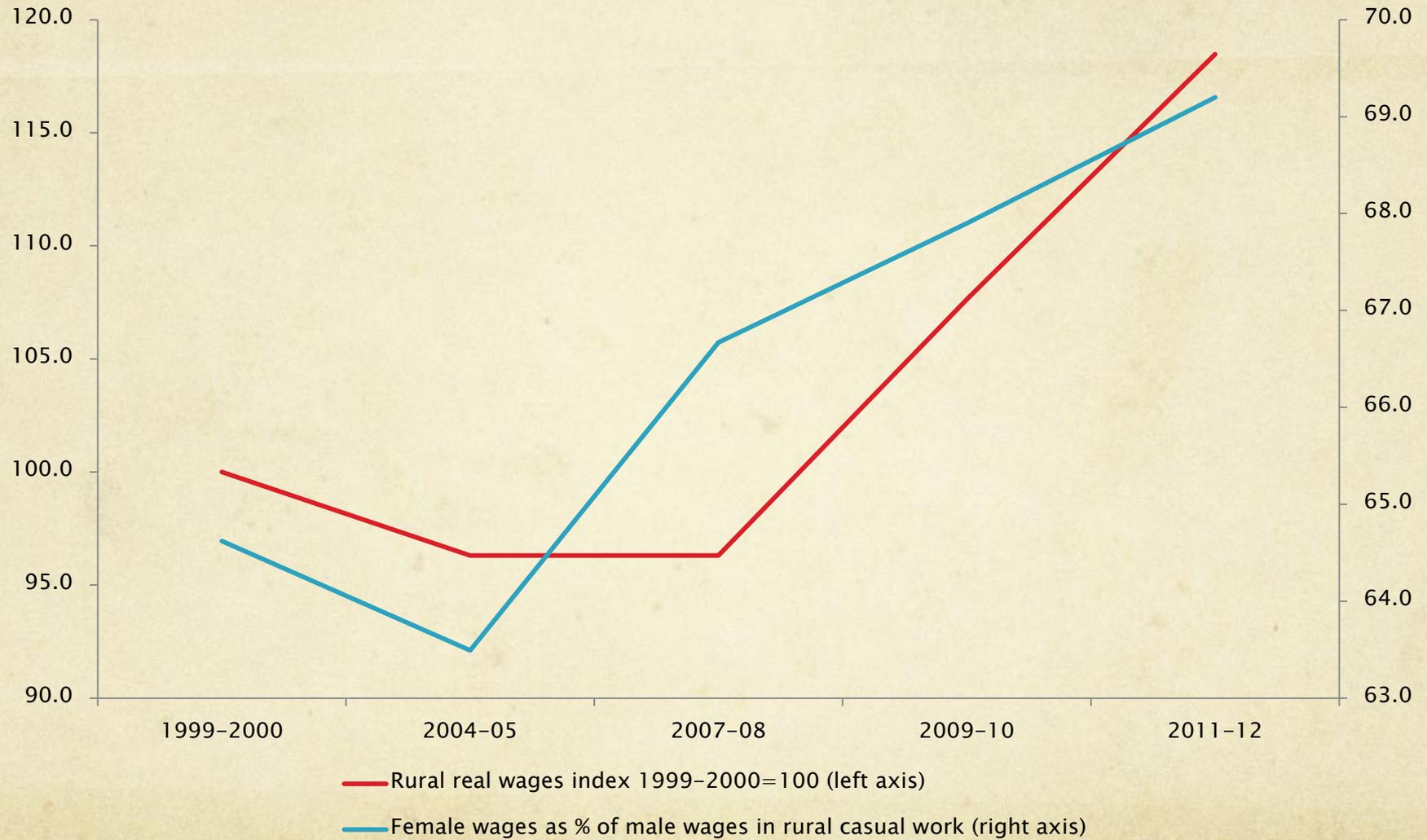
Recent decline in Indian women's work participation rates has been subject of much discussion



Various explanations for this

- Increasing participation in education, especially among younger women
- Mechanisation of agriculture has reduced demand for women's work.
- Ecological changes have led to declines in many rural activities earlier performed mainly by women, such as the collection of minor forest produce.
- Social perceptions about women and their capacities to deal with new technologies
- Decline of “distress” work as wages and real incomes of households improve – family-level backward bending supply curve of labour.
- Role of MNREGA in providing better work alternatives and reducing need for extremely arduous and low paid work.

Real wages for rural casual work in India (other than public works)



Work is inadequately captured in Indian data

NSS description “neither working nor available for work (or not in labour force)” includes the following codes:

- 91 - attended educational institutions
- 92 - attended to domestic duties only
- 93 - attended to domestic duties and was also engaged in free collection of goods (vegetables, roots, firewood, cattle feed, etc.), sewing, tailoring, weaving, etc. for household use
- 94 - rentiers, pensioners, remittance recipients, etc.
- 95 - not able to work owing to disability
- 97 - others (including beggars, prostitutes, etc.)
- 98 - did not work owing to sickness (for casual workers only)
- 99 - children of age 0-4 years.

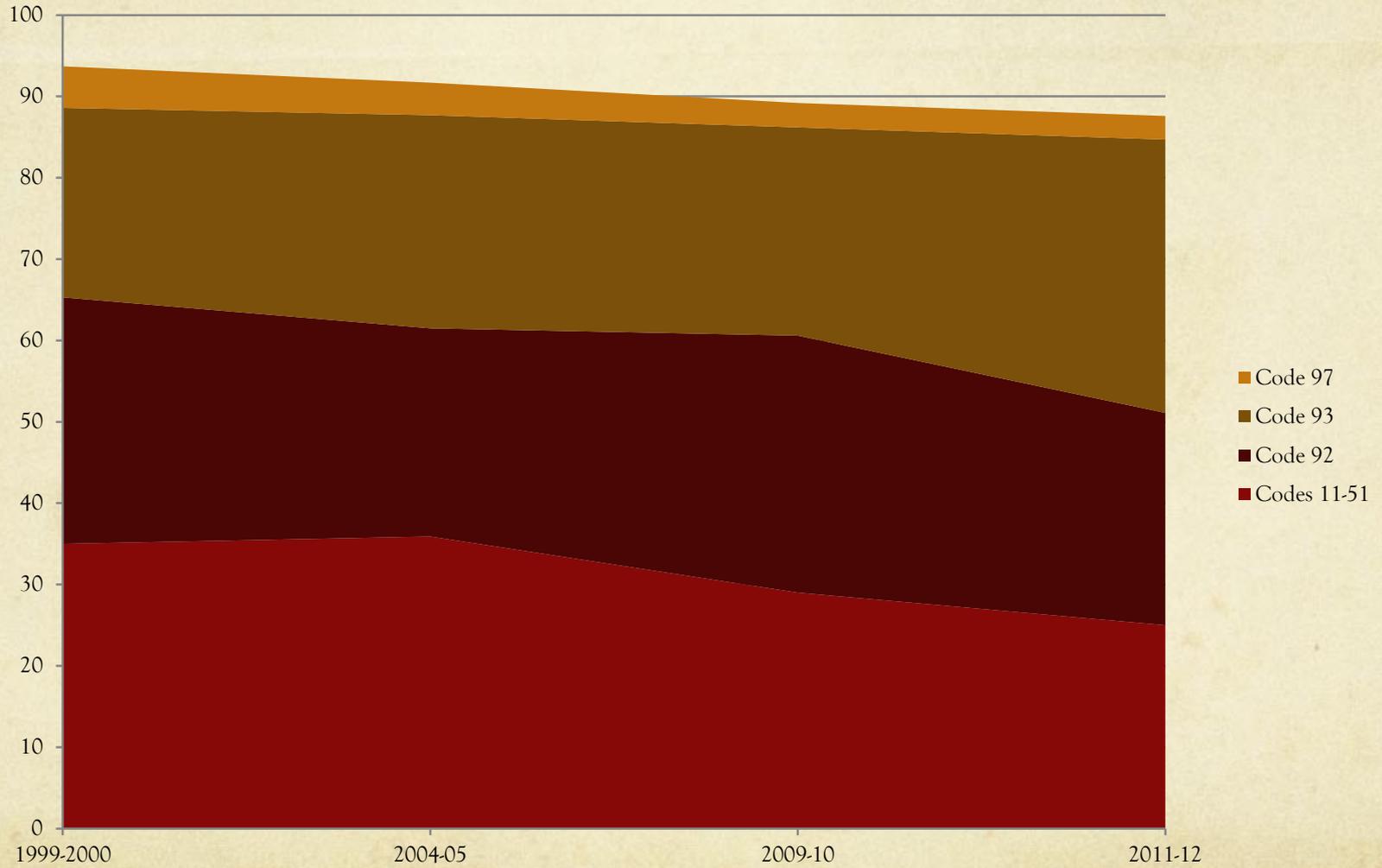
Unpaid labour and some paid labour are excluded from work

- Codes 92 and 93 are different from other codes because they involve the production of goods and services that are potentially marketable and are therefore economic in nature.
- When they are outsourced for payment by any household, they are included in both national income and in estimates of employment and therefore “work”.
- Code 97 is a different kind of anomaly: marketed activities that are not considered as work (presumably for some moral reasons, though this is not clarified). For example, why should “smuggling” be work if prostitution is not?
- Also, Codes 41-51 that refer to work include “unpaid helper in family enterprise” so the distinction is even more uncertain.

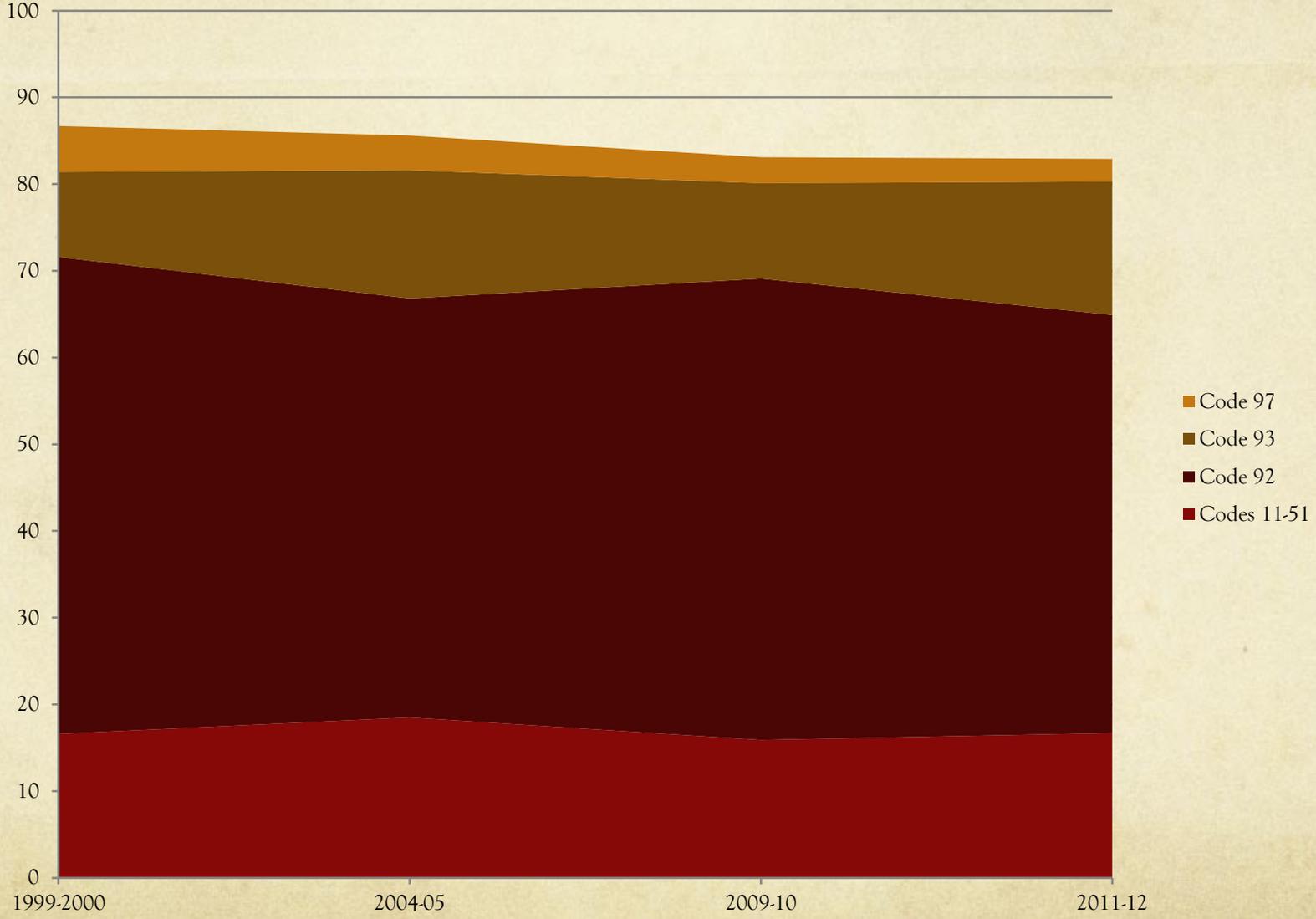
Including Codes 92, 93 and 97 means *more* Indian women work than men, not less



Rural female work participation rates



Urban women's work participation rate



Unpaid work trends in India

- Almost all of the increase in number of unpaid women workers has been of those engaged in the collection of essentials goods like fuel wood (rural) and water (urban and rural).
- This reflects the decline in access to common property resources and the lack of basic amenities like piped water and fuel in both rural and urban areas, in addition to inadequate provision of essential care services.
- In 2011-12, 92 per cent of rural women and 93 per cent of urban women spent most time on unpaid work, and 70 and 74 per cent said it was because no one else was available to do this work and they could not afford to hire someone to do it.
- There is also the issue of time poverty associated with this work.

Implications

- If this unpaid but socially necessary work is recognised, then **more** Indian women work than men.
- This does not take into account the “double burden” of work, since this is not about time use but usual principal activity.
- The decline in work force participation in India can then be explained by the increase in education among younger females.
- Decline in male work participation is then **stronger** than for women – and also driven by education.
- This also affects “recognised work” by reducing value of women’s work and making it more difficult for women to participate in paid work
- This approach should change estimates of aggregate labour productivity, since more workers are engaged in activities that subsidise the production of recorded GDP.

Dealing with unpaid work

- The demand for systems of private remuneration for unpaid work is conceptually flawed and operationally problematic.
- Focus should be on 4Rs: Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute **and Respect!**
- Redistribution involves public provision as well as policies and social changes for gendered redistribution.
- Issues relating to definition and estimation of “labour productivity” as well as the relation of unpaid work with accumulation strategies require further thought and research.

Policy significance

- Major expansion of good quality publicly provided affordable social services: basic infrastructure including access to fuel and water, nutrition, health, education, sanitation, child care, provisioning of essential household needs, assistance with age, sickness and disability related needs.
- This provision has to be with proper wages and decent work conditions of those providing these services (often mostly women).
- Strong positive multiplier effects can generate local economic growth – and more employment including of women!
- Universal social protection including pensions to ensure that unpaid workers get their social dues.

The care economy can be a big future job provider, especially given concerns about technology replacing other jobs

- Because of its relational nature and associated flexibilities required of workers, even in its most “unskilled” form, care work is never “routine” and requires cognitive input and responses.
- So technology can never replace human engagement completely, even if it can assist in reducing drudgery of some care activities and make others easier to perform more efficiently.
- Demand for care is hard to adjust and in some cases cannot be adjusted at all – non-delivery of such care will result in actual detriment to the potential receiver rather than simply deferment or reduction of perceived wants.
- Care economy is likely to expand at a faster rate than many other economic activities, with income elasticity of demand greater than one.

One method of estimating future demand for care

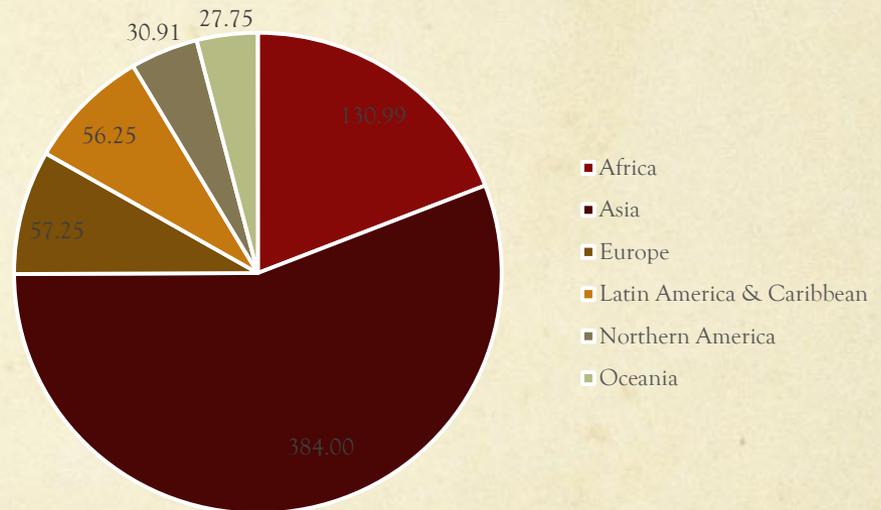
- Take Sweden 2014 as benchmark to estimate likely/desirable care worker requirements in the future for all societies.
- “Health workers”: health care managers, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologist and psychotherapists, other health care therapists and complementary medicine therapists, dentists and dental nurses and other health care assistants: 1 worker per 12.82 persons.
- Child care workers: pre-school managers, primary and pre-school teachers, and childcare workers and teachers’ aides: 1 worker per 3.6 children (0-14 years).
- Elderly care workers: elderly care managers and attendants, personal assistants and related work: 1 workers per 16.24 elderly people.
- Apply these numbers to 2030 population projections.

Projections for 2030

For world as a whole

- Health care workers:
663 million
- Child care workers:
340 million
- Elderly care workers:
86 million

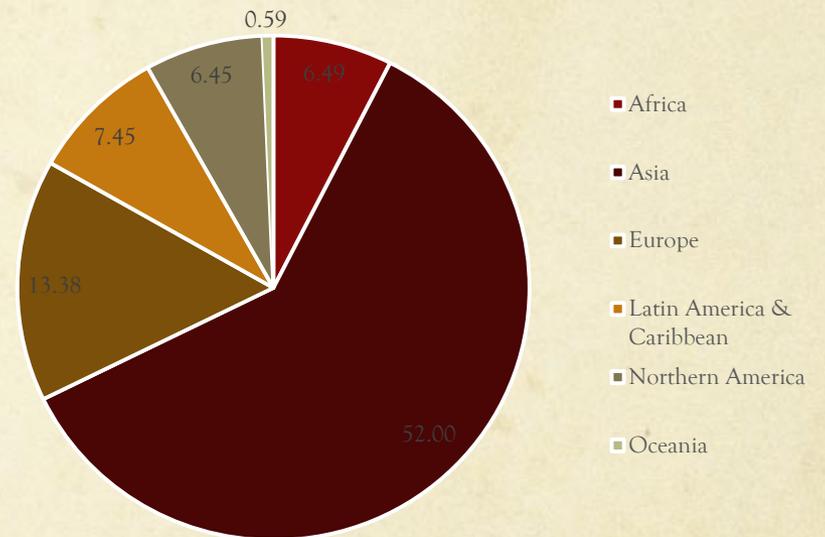
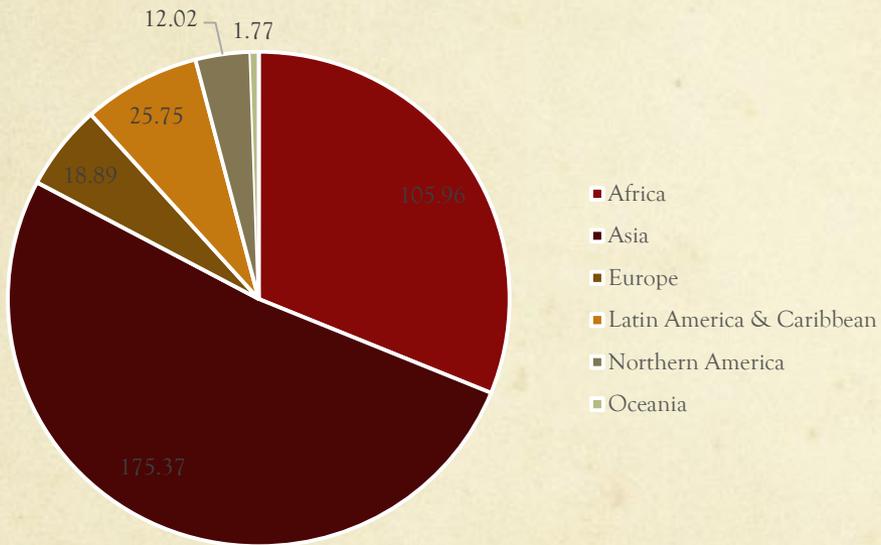
Likely requirement of health workers in 2030
(millions)



Projections for 2030

Likely requirement of dedicated child care workers in 2030, millions

Likely requirement of dedicated elderly care workers in 2030, millions



So the employment challenge in developing Asia can be converted into an opportunity:
by emphasising public investment in care,
which improves the quality of life,
improves aggregate labour productivity,
enables more participation of women in the paid work force, and
provides more employment directly and through multiplier effects.

Thanks for your attention!