

# "Outsourcing in Sub-Saharan Africa: Its Development Potential for Women"

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# What is outsourcing?

- Outsourcing represents the fragmentation of the labor process necessary to produce a product from start to finish.
- Contemporary outsourcing reaches beyond international borders.
- Information technologies synchronize global production such that fragmentation can occur.
- Usually, the most tedious and expensive aspects of the labor process are outsourced.
- More flexible definitions of what is made in a particular country have to be legislated as well as tariff flexibility that focuses on “assembly”.

# Literature on Runaway Shops

- Helen Safa examines runaway shops in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. She argues that runaway shops relocate to the home countries of immigrants in textiles and electronics.
- Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly studies the maquiladores, garment industries in northern Mexico, so located to curb immigration to the US.

# Conditions for Outsourcing

- Transfer of investment from core to periphery or semi-periphery
- Defined labor pool
- Little advocacy
- Few fringe benefits
- Focused on manufacturing and service production

# Characteristics of Rural African Women

- Married with husband absent or single head of household
- Participating in the “triple day” of informal employment, formal employment, and domestic work
- Farming at the sub-subsistence level
- Not earning enough cash from any of the above activities
- Having to purchase most food consumed
- Having two or more children
- Having to pay school fees
- May have several years of schooling
- Having access to land through husband or male relatives
- Having little access to health care
- Having limited access to clean water and sanitation
- Having limited access to public transportation

# Outsourcing Often Used in Rural Africa as a Development Strategy

- Examples of outsourcing abound in my anthropological research in rural southern Africa.
- In rural Swaziland, expatriate women established “cottage industries” in which they distribute mohair for spinning at home and weaving by rural Swazi women on the work site. Weavings in Swazi rural motifs are executed as tapestries and other household items.
- In rural Lesotho, CARE developed appropriate technologies for spinning devices from bicycle wheels and established a worksite with looms for Swazi weavers.
- Many women learn handicrafts in schools and therefore have adequate background to work on these projects.

# Potential Benefits of Outsourcing to Women in Rural Africa

- Higher wages
- Portable skills
- Greater access to schooling for child
- Greater access to rural infrastructure, including water, land, agricultural inputs, transportation
- Greater access to health care
- Overall alleviation of rural poverty
- Increasing women's empowerment through advocacy

# Conclusions

- Outsourcing can be a vehicle for achieving several UN Millennium Goals, including the following: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; and developing a global partnership for development.