women undertake more than 75 per cent of agricultural work they own less than 10 per cent of the land. Comparable disparities have been identified in Kenya, Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Pakistan, research reveals that women owned less than 3 per cent of plots in sampled villages, despite having the right to inherit land in most villages. Where women own assets they have more control over household decision-making. For example, in rural Bangladesh households, when women’s shares of pre-wedding assets are higher than their husbands’, their influence in household decisions is greater and levels of sickness among their daughters decrease. The benefits of ownership can also extend beyond household bargaining dynamics, with positive implications for productivity and growth, particularly in agriculture. Giving women greater control over land and farm planning and management can enhance agricultural productivity. A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute suggests that if gender inequalities were reduced in Burkina Faso, and men and women farmers given equal access to quality agricultural inputs and education, agricultural productivity could rise by as much as 20 per cent.

An earlier study on women farmers in Kenya revealed that crop yields could be increased by 24 per cent if all women farmers were to receive a primary education. Another study in Bangladesh reached a similar conclusion, showing that providing women with specific resources such as high-yielding vegetable seeds and polyculture fish technology in fish ponds leased to groups of low-income women has a greater impact on poverty reduction than untargeted technology dissemination, which is more likely to benefit men and more affluent households.

Empowering women through other types of investment can also have positive effects on economic growth and poverty reduction. Research indicates that providing women with skills training and access to new technologies gives them greater mobility and increases their control over resources, enhances their political awareness and reduces instances of domestic violence.

Where women work matters for children
Female participation in the workforce can be beneficial to children, because it often results in women gaining greater access to, and control of, economic resources. But paid employment for women does not automatically lead to better outcomes for children. Factors such as the amount of time women spend working outside the household, the conditions under which they are employed and who controls the income they generate determine how their employment affects their own well-being and that of their children.

**Women’s informal employment and its impact on children**

The increased participation of women in the labour force has not always been matched by an equivalent improvement in their working conditions or job security. Women are less likely than men to enjoy job security, working in positions with low earnings, little financial security and few or no social benefits. As growing numbers of women join the labour force, there has been a parallel increase in informal and non-standard forms of employment. In developing countries, the majority of women workers outside agriculture are concentrated in the informal sector. They are more likely than men to be own-account workers, domestic workers, industrial outworkers or unpaid workers in family enterprises.

By its very nature, informal work is less visible in national statistics due to the lack of systematic reporting. Collecting accurate and comprehensive information on the informal sector remains problematic because of the wide-ranging nature of activities, non-formal organizational structures and diverse modes of operation involved.

In nearly all developing regions, 60 per cent or more of women engaged in non-agricultural work activities are in informal employment. The exception is North Africa, where women’s participation in the informal sector is 43 per cent. Of the developing regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of informally employed women (84 per cent). Individual developing countries show wide variation across regions (see Figure 3.5, page 44).

Women working in the informal sector often face difficult working conditions, long hours and unscheduled overtime. The lack of job security and benefits such as paid sick leave and childcare provisions can leave women and their children at a higher risk of poverty. When mothers are poor, engaged in time-intensive, underpaid and inflexible informal work, and have little control over their earnings and few alternative caregivers, children are significantly more at risk of poor health and growth.

Such conditions are prevalent in many areas of both informal employment and low-income