

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BEIJING+10: SELECTED ISSUES

Presentations from 2004 High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to
Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing
Platform for Action and its Regional
and Global Outcomes



United Nations
ESCAP

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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Global Outcomes



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PREFACE

The High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes was convened at Bangkok, Thailand, from 7-10 September 2004 in pursuant to a decision by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its fifty-seventh session in 2001 to review the implementation in Asia and the Pacific of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which had been adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, held in New York in 2000. The meeting also constituted the regional preparatory activity for the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which was carried out by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session, held in New York in March 2005.

The Meeting concluded with the adoption of the Bangkok Communiqué which reaffirmed the consensus Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and renewed the commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Bangkok Communiqué further acknowledged the gains made and remaining gaps in the region in the context of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It also recognized the need to address a number of challenges facing the region in this regard.

In addition to the deliberations made by the representatives of the participating countries, the Meeting also had before it a selection of presentations by the region's first rate experts, from academic institutions, civil society organisations, and international development agencies, providing critical analysis and policy recommendations regarding a number of pertinent issues and concerns in discussing gaps and challenges, as well as opportunities and strategic options in efforts to creating an enabling environment for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

This publication contains the papers prepared by those experts for their presentations at the Meeting. It is hoped that this publication would add value to any efforts and initiatives that are being taken by concerned entities to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and provide useful perspectives and suggestions for the formulation of relevant policies and designing of measures to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

In organizing the Meeting and preparing this publication, a generous financial support provided by the Government of Japan is acknowledged with sincere appreciation. In-kind assistance was provided by various United Nations and other international development entities, and intergovernmental organisations, in particular the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UN DAW) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), is also much appreciated.

This publication has been issued without formal editing. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat. The designations of authors employed in this publication were confirmed at the time of the Meeting.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	iii
CHAPTER I Gaps and Challenges	1
Globalisation and Economic Empowerment of Women: Emerging Issues in Asia	3
Fishing in the Stream of Migration: Combating Modern forms of Trafficking While Respecting Women’s Freedom of Movement	15
Globalization and the Economic Empowerment of Women: Defining and Building a Gender-Responsive Information Society in the ESCAP Region	24
Engendering Governance and Political Participation of Women: Challenges and Responses	39
CHAPTER II Strategies and Approaches for Creating an Enabling Environment	47
Gender Mainstreaming: A Key Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality at National Level	49
Women’s Human Rights: A Framework for Gender Equality and Development in the Asia Pacific Region	58
Partnerships and Regional Cooperation	65
Men’s Roles in the Promotion of Gender Equality in the Asia-Pacific Region	85

CHAPTER I
Gaps and Challenges

GLOBALISATION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: EMERGING ISSUES IN ASIA

*Professor Jayati Ghosh**

The past two decades have been momentous for the Asian region. This is now the most “globally integrated” region in the world, with the highest average ratios of trade to GDP, the largest absolute inflows of foreign direct investment, substantial financial capital flows and even significant movements of labour. These processes have in turn been associated with very rapid changes in forms of work and life, especially for women. Indeed, the changes have been seismic in their speed, intensity and effects upon economies and societies in the region, and particularly upon gender relations. The processes of rapid growth (and equally rapid and sudden declines in some economies) have been accompanied by major shifts in employment patterns and living standards, as familiar trends are replaced by social changes that are now extremely accelerated and intensified.

We have thus observed, in the space of less than one generation, massive shifts of women’s labour into the paid workforce, especially in export-oriented employment, and then the subsequent ejection of older women and even younger counterparts, into more fragile and insecure forms of employment, or even back to unpaid housework. Women have moved – voluntarily or forcibly – in search of work across countries and regions, more than ever before. Women’s livelihoods in rural areas, dominantly in agriculture, have been affected by the agrarian crisis that is now widespread in most developing countries. Across societies in the region, massive increases in the availability of different consumer goods, due to trade liberalisation, have accompanied declines in access to basic public goods and services. At the same time, technological changes have made communication and the transmission of cultural forms more extensive and rapid than could even have been imagined in the past. All these have had very substantial and complex effects upon the position of women and their ability to control their own lives, many of which we do not still adequately understand.

In this note I will consider some of these recent changes and the implications that they have for policy intervention at national and regional levels. The next section outlines major macroeconomic and labour market trends of recent years. This is followed by considerations of the patterns of Asian women’s economic participation in export-oriented employment, in services and through migration. The implications for public policy, and the extent to which the Beijing Platform goals have been achieved, are very briefly considered in the final section.

Recent macroeconomic and labour market trends in Asia

Asia is probably the most economically “globalised” region, and is also seen as the part of the world that has benefited the most from the process of globalisation. In terms of growth rates of aggregate GDP, this region – and especially East Asia and India – far outperformed the rest of the world. High rates of growth in East Asia are of course dominated by the performance of China; however, in several countries of Southeast Asia such as Malaysia and South Korea, the relatively rapid recovery from the crisis of 1997-98 has added to the general perception of inherent economic dynamism in the region as a whole.

It is now commonplace to note that this economic expansion was fuelled by export growth, especially in East Asia. What is noteworthy is that until 1996, for most high-exporting economies except China, the rate of expansion of imports was even higher, and the period of high growth was therefore one of rapidly increasing trade-to-GDP ratios. For the whole of East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, trade amounted to more than 60 per cent of GDP in the 1990s, which is historically unprecedented. Of course, Singapore and Hong Kong China have always had high trade-GDP ratios in excess of 200 per cent because of their status as entrepot nations, but countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam have shown ratios greater than or approaching 100 per cent. Even the giant economy of the region, China, had a trade of GDP ratio of 44 per cent in 2001, and it is estimated to have increased further since then.

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This very substantial degree of trade integration has several important macroeconomic implications. First, since these economies are heavily dependent upon exports as the engine of growth, they must rely either on rapid rates of growth of world trade which have not been forthcoming in the recent past) or increasing their shares of world markets. In the last decade the second feature has been more pronounced, but of course such a process has inevitable limits, set either by rising protectionist tendencies in the importing countries, or by the competitive pressures from other exporting countries which give rise to the fallacy of composition argument. These have adversely affected terms of trade of high-exporting developing countries over the past decade, such that rapid increases in the volume of exports have not been matched by commensurate increases in the value of exports. This in turn means that the search for newer or increased forms of cost-cutting or labour productivity increases is still very potent. This is one reason why employment elasticities of export production have been falling throughout the region, and have also affected women's employment in these sectors, as discussed below.

Second, the high rates of growth are matched or exceeded by very high import growth in almost all the economies of the region, barring China and Taiwan China, which are still generating substantial trade surpluses. The net effect on manufacturing employment is typically negative. This is obvious if the economy has a manufacturing trade deficit, but it is also the case even with trade balance or with small manufacturing trade surpluses, if the export production is less employment-intensive than the local production that has been displaced by imports. This is why, barring China and Malaysia, all the economies in the region have experienced deceleration or even absolute declines in manufacturing employment despite the much-hyped perception of the North "exporting" jobs to the South.¹ It should be noted that China, which accounted for more than 90 per cent of the total increase in manufacturing employment in the region, could show such a trend because imports were still relatively controlled until 2001, and because state owned enterprises continued to play a significant role in total manufacturing employment.

This region also experienced the most capital flows in the developing world from the mid-1980s until 1997. Thereafter, the Southeast Asian financial crises put a sharp brake on such inflows, other than FDI. From the mid-1990s, even FDI inflow reduced quite sharply in most countries of the region other than China. China, of course, remains the most significant developing country recipient of FDI inflows, and in 2002 achieved first position in the world in this regard, beating the US economy to second place.² However, FDI and portfolio flows have been even more volatile and less reliable for Asia in the recent past. Net capital flows into the region have been negative or close to negative for the past four years. The huge build-up of foreign exchange reserves by the central banks of the Asian region over 2003 and early 2004 (much of which is being held as securities or in safe deposits in the developed world, especially the US) suggests that net outflows in the current year are likely to be particularly large. The current capital export is really the result of reserve build-up because of central banks in the region attempting to prevent currencies from appreciating, as some of the lessons from the 1997 crisis are still retained by policy makers in the region.

What this means, is that economies in the region are generally operating below the full macroeconomic potential, which in turn affects employment conditions, especially for women workers. In many countries of the region, as evident from Table 1, there has been a decline in female labour force participation rates since 1995. In some countries, such as Cambodia and Thailand, the decline has been quite drastic. Very few economies reported an increase (Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong China), and these were relatively much less in magnitude. It is likely that reduced opportunities for productive employment have been responsible for the tendency for fewer women to report themselves as being part of the labour force, what is known in the developed countries as the "discouraged worker" effect. Further, the defeminisation of export-oriented production at the margin, a process which began even earlier than the Asian financial crisis, has continued.

¹ This question has been considered in detail in Ghosh (2003a), which examines patterns of manufacturing employment in the most "dynamic" developing country exporters over the 1990s.

² However, much of this FDI (around 60 to 70 per cent according to some estimates) is effectively "round-tripping" as unrecorded capital outflows come back in the form of Non-Resident Chinese investment because of the constraints that were placed upon resident private investors.

Table 1: Labour force participation rates

	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	<i>1990</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>Latest year</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>Latest year</i>
Bangladesh	88.0	87.0	88.8	65.4	65.9	55.9
China	85.0	85.6		73.0	73.7	
Hong Kong China	78.9	76.6	75.5	46.6	47.6	48.5
Cambodia	84.3	87.1	81.2	82.0	82.6	73.5
India	51.5		51.9	22.3		25.7
Indonesia	82.7	82.3	84.6	44.6	52.8	51.5
Malaysia	81.9	83.2	82.8	45.2	48.9	44.7
Pakistan	84.9	82.3	82.4	11.3	12.7	15.2
Philippines	81.8	82.1	81.8	47.5	49.0	50.0
Singapore	79.2	78.4	77.5	50.3	50.0	51.3
South Korea	74.0	76.5	74.4	47.0	48.3	47.4
Sri Lanka	77.9	74.8	77.5	45.3	35.8	37.6
Thailand	87.7	86.4	80.3	76.3	73.5	64.2
Vietnam	85.2	83.5		75.9	74.6	

Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 2003 (Except for India, for which Census of India).

Notes: 1. The latest year varies according to country, from 1998 to 2001.
2. The data relate to population aged 15 years and above.

Table 1 points to some interesting variations across major Asian economies. Cambodia, Thailand and Sri Lanka show continuous and very sharp declines in female labour force participation rates since 1990, while male rates also declined, albeit less dramatically. In South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia, female labour force participation rates increased until 1995 and have declined thereafter. In East Asia, only China and the Philippines – the two economies whose manufacturing exports remained buoyant over the 1990s and subsequently – show rising rates of female labour force participation. In South Asia, the picture is more mixed. While women’s labour force participation appears to have been rising in India, this is mainly due to the increase in “marginal work” (defined in the Census as less than 183 days per year), while in Pakistan such rates have been increasing over a very low base. Overall, the picture across most of the Asian region is of reduced employment opportunities for women translating into reductions in labour force participation as well as higher rates of open unemployment.

In addition to these changes in labour force participation, evidence suggests that in general the paid work performed by women has become less permanent and more casual or part-time in nature. In South Korea, one of the few countries for which such data is available, the proportion of employed women with casual contracts nearly doubled between 1990 and 1999; over the 1990s, around 60 per cent of all casual jobs were held by women workers.

Not only have paid employment conditions for women workers deteriorated in the region, but unpaid homework also tended to involve longer hours as the post-crisis adjustment process led to cuts in the provision of and access to public services. Only in China did paid employment for women workers, including in manufacturing, continue to grow – but even in China, services employment dominated in total employment for women, at more than 35 per cent. Gender wage gaps have narrowed slightly in most countries in the region, but they remain very high compared to other regions of the world. Thus, in South Korea, the average female wage in manufacturing as a ratio of the male wage increased from 0.51 in 1985 to 0.58 in 1993 to 0.63 in 2002, but this is still below the ratio even in most other developing Asian countries. In other countries of the region, this ratio currently varies from 0.7 to 0.85.³

³ ILO Labour Statistics database, www.laborsta.org.

One significant change in labour markets of Asia is the increase in open unemployment, which is a direct reflection of global recessionary tendencies manifested in the region. This marks a change, because Asian developing countries have typically have had lower open unemployment rates simply because of the lack of social security and unemployment benefits in most such societies, which usually ensures that people undertake some activity, however low paying, and usually in the form of self employment. Therefore disguised unemployment or underemployment has generally been the more prevalent phenomenon in developing societies. The recent emergence of high open unemployment rates therefore suggests that the problem of finding jobs has become so acute that it is now captured even in such data, and may also herald substantial social changes in the developing world. Furthermore, in most Asian countries, youth unemployment is particularly high.

Table 2: Open unemployment rates

(as per cent of labour force)

	2000	2001	2002
Industrial countries	6.1	6.4	6.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	9.7	9.6	9.9
Middle East and North Africa	17.9	18.9	18.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	13.7	14.0	14.4
Transition economies	13.5	12.6	13.5
Asia and the Pacific	3.8	4.1	4.2
Of which:			
East Asia	3.2	3.6	4.0
Southeast Asia	6.0	6.8	6.5
South Asia	3.4	3.5	3.4

Source: Global Labour Trends 2003, ILO Geneva.

In many Asian economies, moreover, underemployment continues to be the most significant concern. This is especially true in Southeast and South Asia. In Nepal, underemployment is officially estimated to be as high as half of the workforce, while in Indonesia and the Philippines, disguised unemployment is high and rising, especially in the informal sector.

Another very significant change in the recent past is the decline in formal sector employment. This has been associated with the proliferation of workers crowded into the informal sector, in the low-wage low-productivity occupations that are characteristic of “refuge sectors” in labour markets. While there are also some high value added jobs increasingly in the informal sector (including, for example, computer professionals, and some high-end IT-enabled services) these are relatively small in number and certainly too few to make much of a dent in the overall trend, especially in countries where the vast bulk of the labour forces is unskilled or relatively less skilled. In turn, this has meant that the cycle of poverty-low employment generation-poverty has been accentuated because of the diminished willingness or ability of developing country governments to intervene positively for expanded employment generation.

The decline in employment elasticities of production is a tendency which is especially marked in developing countries. To some extent this reflects the impact of international concentration of production and export orientation, as the necessity of making products that will be acceptable on world markets requires the use of new technologies developed in the North and inherently labour-saving in nature. But what is interesting is the extent to which declining employment elasticities in developing Asia have marked all the major productive sectors, including agriculture. This is evident from Table 3, which describes the employment elasticity of GDP growth in the major productive sectors over 1990-2000 in the major economies of Southeast and South Asia. Agriculture is clearly no longer a refuge sector for those unable to find employment elsewhere – the data indicate low or even negative employment elasticity in this sector, reflecting a combination of labour-saving technological changes such as greater use of threshers and harvesters, and changes in landholding patterns resulting in lower extents of the traditional small peasant farming, because of the reduced economic viability of smallholder cultivation across the region. The service sector, by contrast, seems to have emerged as the refuge sector in this region, except possibly in countries like Sri Lanka and India.

Table 3: Employment elasticities of GDP growth, 1990-2000

	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Services</i>
Indonesia	-0.43	0.76	1.23
Malaysia	-2.51	0.54	0.54
Philippines	0.04	0.57	0.90
Singapore	-	0	0.50
Thailand	-1.25	0.65	1.35
Vietnam	0.33	0.30	1.12
Bangladesh	0.21	- 0.5	1.94
India	0.02	0.29	0.76
Pakistan	0.36	0.22	1.08
Sri Lanka	-0.94	0.16	0.22

Source: Global Labour Trends 2003, ILO Geneva.

The emergence of global production chains is another very important feature of the recent past. These are not entirely new, and even the current chains can be dated from at least the 1980s. However, two major sets of changes have dramatically increased the relocation possibilities in international production. The first set includes technological changes, which have allowed for different parts of the production process to be split and locationally separated, as well as created different types of requirement for labour involving a few highly skilled professional workers and a vast bulk of semi-skilled workers for whom burnout is more widely prevalent than learning by doing. The second set includes organisational changes which are associated with concentration of ownership and control but also with greater dispersion and more layers of outsourcing and subcontracting of particular activities and parts of the production process.

Therefore, we now have the emergence of international suppliers of goods who rely less and less on direct production within a specific location and more on subcontracting a greater part of their production activities. Thus, the recent period has seen the emergence and market domination of “manufacturers without factories”, as multinational firms such as Nike and Adidas effectively rely on a complex system of outsourced and subcontracted production based on centrally determined design and quality control. This has been strongly associated with the increase in export oriented production in manufacturing in a range of developing countries, especially in textiles and garments, computer hardware, consumer electronics and related sectors. It is true that the increasing use of outsourcing is not confined to export firms; however, because of the flexibility offered by subcontracting, it is clearly of even greater advantage in the intensely competitive exporting sectors and therefore tends to be even more widely used there.

Much of this outsourcing activity is based in Asia, although Latin America is also emerging as an important location once again. Such subcontracted producers in turn vary in size and manufacturing capacity, from medium-sized factories to pure middlemen collecting the output of home-based workers. The crucial role of women workers in such international production activity is now increasingly recognised, whether as wage labour in small factories and workshops run by subcontracting firms, or as piece-rate payment based homeworkers who deal with middlemen in a complex production chain.

Trade liberalisation, export employment and women’s work

The relative increase in the share of women in total export employment, which was so marked for a period especially in the more dynamic economies of Asia, has turned out to be a rather short-lived phenomenon. Already by the mid 1990s, women’s share of manufacturing employment had peaked in most economies of the region, and in some countries it even declined in absolute numbers. Some of this reflected that fact that such export-oriented employment through relocative foreign investment simply moved to cheaper locations: from Malaysia to Indonesia and Vietnam; from Thailand to Cambodia and Myanmar, and so on. But even in the newer locations, the recent problems of the garments industry worldwide have meant that jobs (especially for women workers) were created and then lost within a space of a few years.

From the early 1980s onwards, the increasing importance of export-oriented manufacturing activities in many developed countries had been associated with a much greater reliance on women’s paid labour. This process was most marked over the period 1980 to 1995 in the high-exporting economies of East and

Southeast Asia, where the share of female employment in total employment in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and export-oriented manufacturing industries typically exceeded 70 per cent. It was also observed in a number of other developing countries, for example in Latin America in certain types of export manufacturing.

Thus, the dramatic economic boom in East and Southeast Asia over the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, based on rapid export expansion, was itself based on the growing use of women as wage workers. Indeed, it is now widely appreciated that the Asian export boom was driven by the productive contributions of Asian women : in the form of paid labour in export-related activities and in services, through the remittances made by migrant women workers, and through the vast amounts of unpaid labour of women as liberalisation and government fiscal contraction transferred many areas to public provision of goods and services to households (and thereby to women within households).

This trend towards feminisation of employment in Asian countries resulted from employers' needs for cheaper and more "flexible" sources of labour, and was also strongly associated with the moves towards casualisation of labour, shift to part-time work or piece-rate contracts, and insistence on greater freedom for hiring and firing over the economic cycle. All these aspects of what is now described as "labour market flexibility" became necessary once external competitiveness became the significant goal of domestic policy makers and defined the contours within which domestic and foreign employers in these economies operated. Feminisation was also encouraged by the widespread conviction among employers in East and Southeast Asia that female employees are more tractable and subservient to managerial authority, less prone to organise into unions, more willing to accept lower wages because of their own lower reservation and aspiration wages, and easier to dismiss using life-cycle criteria such as marriage and childbirth. This was made more relevant because of technological changes which encouraged the use of labour which could be replaced at periodic intervals.

The feminisation of such activities had both positive and negative effects for the women concerned. On the one hand, it definitely meant greater recognition and remuneration of women's work, and typically improved the relative status and bargaining power of women within households, as well as their own self-worth, thereby leading to empowerment. On the other hand, it is also true that most women are rarely if ever "unemployed" in their lives, in that they are almost continuously involved in various forms of productive or reproductive activities, even if they are not recognised as "working" or paid for such activities. This means that the increase in paid employment may lead to an onerous double burden of work *unless* other social policies and institutions emerge to deal with the work traditionally assigned to (unpaid) women.

Given these features, it has been fairly clear for some time now that the feminisation of work need not be a cause for unqualified celebration on the part of those interested in improving women's material status. However, it has recently become evident that the process of feminisation of labour in export-oriented industries may have been even more dependent upon the relative inferiority of remuneration and working conditions, than was generally supposed. The process of feminisation of export employment in most of the Asian region peaked somewhere in the early 1990s (and even earlier in some countries). Thereafter the process was not only less marked, and even began to peter out. This is significant because it refers very clearly to the period *before* the effects of the financial crisis began to make themselves felt on real economic activity, and even before the slowdown in the growth rate of export production. So, while the crisis may have hastened the process whereby women workers are disproportionately prone to job loss because of the very nature of their employment contracts, in fact the marginal reliance on women workers in export manufacturing activity (or rather in the manufacturing sector in general) had already begun to reduce *before* the crisis.⁴

The reversal of the process of feminisation of work has already been observed in other parts of the developing world, notably in Latin America. Quite often, such declines in female share of employment were associated with either one of two conditions : an overall decline in employment opportunities because of recession or structural adjustment measures, or a shift in the nature of the new employment generation towards more skilled or lucrative activities. There could be another factor. As women became an established

⁴ This argument is provided in more detail in Ghosh "Export-oriented employment of women in India" in Razavi and Pearson (eds) Social policy and women's export employment, Palgrave, forthcoming.

part of the paid work force, and even the dominant part in certain sectors (as indeed they did become in the textiles, ready made garments and consumer electronics sectors of East Asia) it became more difficult to exercise the traditional type of gender discrimination at work. Not only was there an upward pressure on their wages, but there were other pressures for legislation which would improve their overall conditions of work. Social action and legislation designed to improve the conditions of women workers, tended to reduce the relative attractiveness of women workers for those employers who had earlier been relying on the inferior conditions of women's work to enhance their export profitability. The rise in wages also tended to have the same effect. Thus, as the relative effective remuneration of women improved (in terms of the total package of wage and work and contract conditions), their attractiveness to employers decreased.

In the subsequent period, manufacturing has tended to occupy a much less significant position in total employment of women. In Malaysia the share of women workers in manufacturing to all employed women fell from its peak of 31 per cent in 1992 to 26 per cent in 1999; in the Philippines from 13.3 per cent in 1991 to less than 12 per cent in 1999; in South Korea from its peak of 28 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 2000; and in Hong Kong China from 32 per cent in 1990 to 10 per cent in 1999.⁵ Recent evidence from India (Varma and Neetha, 2003) suggests that export oriented production does not always result in feminisation of the workforce, which is essentially dependent upon the relative inferiority of wages and work conditions of women. Where both male and female workers are forced by the state of the labour market to accept adverse low-paid and insecure work contracts, there appears to be little preference for young women workers as was previously observed.

In any case, the nature of such work has also changed in recent years. Most such work was already based on short-term contracts rather than permanent employment for women; now there is much greater reliance on women workers in very small units or even in home-based production, at the bottom of a complex subcontracting chain. Labour flexibility surveys in the Philippines have shown that the greater is the degree of labour casualisation, the higher is the proportion of total employment consisting of women and the more vulnerable these women are to exploitative conditions. This has become even more marked in the post-crisis adjustment phase.

In Southeast Asia, women have made up a significant proportion of the informal manufacturing industry workforce, in garment workshops, shoe factories and craft industries. Many women also carry out informal activities as temporary workers in farming or in the building industry. Home-based workers, working for their own account or on a subcontracting basis, have been found to make products ranging from clothing and footwear to artificial flowers and carpets. Home-based work provides substantial opportunity for self-exploitation by workers, especially when payment is on a piece-rate basis; also these are areas typically left unprotected by labour laws and social welfare.

Very recent evidence indicates that even such home-based work may be experiencing some sort of crisis, as the textile and garments exports from developing countries face increasing difficulties in world markets and the pressure of competition forces exporters to seek further avenues of cost-cutting. The extreme volatility of employment that characterises factory-based export-oriented production has also become a feature of home-based work for export production.

Service sector employment of women

Services constitute a very heterogeneous economic category, which has become more difficult to define over time. Older definitions of services were based on the fact that services were often difficult, if not impossible, to separate from the service-provider and recipient, but more recent definitions have incorporated "business services" which also externalise part of R and D and management functions, and include activities like retailing, banking and insurance, and administration, as well as other arms-length transactions. There was an early literature which posited a clear association between a higher share for services in national income and higher economic growth in the long term⁶ but it is now accepted that the relationship between economic growth and the share of services need not be so clear cut, especially in the short or medium term.

⁵ Data from ILO: KILM 2002.

⁶ See Kunzets, Simon (1971) *Economic Growth of Nations, Total Output and Production Structure*, The Belknap Press of Harvard, Cambridge, MA.

Thus, the recent slowdown in growth in the industrial economies has had no effect in terms of reducing the share of services. Rather, fears are now being expressed that the very nature of much service sector work – especially in the labour intensive and low productivity activities – allows for downgrading of wages and work conditions. If this happens, then the expansion of employment in this sector need not always be a sign of dynamism but may actually indicate increased “dualism” in the economy as a whole, with the sector an easy “residual sector” for those unable to find productive employment opportunities in the goods-producing sectors. So growth of the services sector, especially in developing countries, need not always be an indicator of healthy or buoyant overall economic growth.

Women have always been major sources of service sector work, but they have not always been classified as engaged in service sector employment, because much of the work they typically perform comes into the category of unpaid labour, performed within the household or local community. The care economy dominates in such work: thus, all activities such as cooking and cleaning for household members, care of the young, the old and the sick, provisioning of necessary goods (such as fetching water and fuel wood in rural areas) are typically seen as the responsibility of women members of the household in most Asian economies. It is only recently that women’s involvement in paid services has increased across Asia. While there has been some increase in women’s share of paid employment in the formal sector (especially in public employment) in general, women workers tend to be concentrated into the lower paid and more informal types of service activity.

Migrant women workers in and from Asia are dominantly employed in the service sector – especially in domestic service, care-giving and entertainment activities. Within national economies, the paid employment of women in services has been most marked not only in these, but also in petty trading activities. Such work comes dominantly in the form of self-employment, and because most of it is conducted in the informal sector, it is extremely difficult to get reliable estimates of the extent of such employment or its remuneration. Table 4 provides such data as exist on the share of self-employment in all recognised work by women; note however, that this refers to all sectors, not only services.

Table 4: Self-employed women as per cent of all employed women

	<i>1990</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>Latest year</i>
Bangladesh	94.8		
Indonesia	76.0		
Malaysia	35.3		
Pakistan	77.4	66.9	66.9
Philippines	58.8		
Singapore	7.6	8.5	8.5
South Korea	36.9	39.2	39.2
Sri Lanka	57.3		
Thailand	99.4	98.8	98.8

Source: ILO KILM 2002.

Across Asia, two types of work appear to dominate in the service sector employment of women: petty trade, as mentioned above typically as self-employment on the part of the individual woman or the household; and personal services, especially in what can be broadly described as the “care” industry, ranging from domestic service to skilled and unskilled activities in health care and related areas, as well as in the “entertainment” industries which can be seen as a catch-all for a very wide range of legal and illegal activities. Except for East Asia (China, Taiwan, South Korea) formal sector service employment of women remains quite limited.

One new area of service activity that is currently widely discussed relates to the new IT-enabled services, which have become quite important especially for educated workers in a number of Asian countries, especially India, China and the Philippines. Aside from software industries (in which the share of women remains quite small) the emergence of business process outsourcing has been seen as one of the most important future tendencies, which will affect not only domestic labour markets and the status of women workers, but also the possibilities of increased foreign exchange inflows through export of this type of resident labour.

It is possible that some of the optimism surrounding this new source of employment generation may be exaggerated, especially as far as women workers are concerned. Consider recent trends in India, where the buoyancy of IT-enabled services has already received much international attention. The micro evidence suggests that women workers are reasonably involved in this sector, and in particular activities their share of employment is much higher than that for the formal sector as a whole. In the software industry as a whole the share of women workers is estimated to be 27 per cent. However, this sector shows clear signs of labour market segmentation by gender, caste and class. Since almost all of those involved are from the urban upper caste English-speaking elite of Indian society, it has been argued that the pattern of development of the software and IT-enabled services sector brings into sharp relief the tendency of the market to reinforce or aggravate existing socio-economic inequities. While it will certainly draw more educated women into paid jobs and reduce the problem of educated unemployment to some extent, it would not bring about any major transformation in aggregate employment patterns in the near future.

Further, the nature of the work involved in BPO activities can be compared to export-oriented employment, with the difference that a greater degree of education and skill is required of the workers. Recent studies of call centres in Delhi and NOIDA (Mazumdar 2004b, Babu and Neetha 2004) point to the lack of opportunities for development and promotion in such activities, as well as the high degree of burnout, suggesting that absence of what could be called a “career track” in such work. It has been found that since the “productivity” of call centre workers is determined by the number of calls handled while maintaining appropriate “quality levels”, there is constant monitoring and supervision as well as a high premium placed in increasing productivity through intensification of the labour process. Even in a few years, there is evidence of a downward trend in wages in such activities, even though the wages in these call centres remain higher than the average wages of private sector clerks, teacher and nurses. On average, female call centre workers are young and do not last in this activity beyond a few years because of the sheer pressure of the work.

So even in this emerging sector, women’s work tends to be concentrated in the low end, repetitive activities with little chance of upward mobility, recreating the pattern already observed in export-oriented manufacturing production. And there are also possibilities of the future reversal of the process of feminisation of such work, in this case because changes in technology may require less of such work to be outsourced to developing countries in the first place. Such technological changes are likely to be accentuated by the protectionist pressures that are already being felt in the developed countries.

Migration for work by Asian women

Historically, women in Asia did not migrate for work. If they did move, it was usually as part of families which were economic migrants together, accompanying the male head of household. But the past two decades have seen an explosion in female migration for work, both within and across borders, and this is having profound effects on the economies and societies across the region. Within the Asian region, there is a complex and changing mix of countries of origin, destination and those that are both. The dominantly labour-sending countries in all of Asia include Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. The countries that are mainly destinations of host countries for migrant labour include all of those in the Middle East, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan China. Some countries both send and receive international migrants: India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand.

Obviously, migration is a multidimensional phenomenon, which can have many positive effects because it expands the opportunities for productive work and leads to a wider perspective on many social issues, among migrants and among the population of host countries. But it also has negative aspects, dominantly in the nature of work and work conditions and possibilities for abuse of migrant workers by employers and others.

The dominantly labour surplus economies of Asia tend to have an abundance of less skilled workers, but patterns of education vary substantially across the region, and where there is a sufficiently large pool of educated workers, there are also similar migration trajectories. General social and cultural conditions often play a definitive role even in “economic” migration: social exclusion and lack of empowerment of particular groups can lead to pressures or incentives for the movement of labour. For women migrants, the nature of movement and the nature of the work in the destination country can often reflect the extent of patriarchy or gender discrimination in the home country; conversely, more equality at home in terms of access to education and opportunities can help in making women migrants get better benefits.

In addition to the economic and social advantages of migration (remittance inflows, training of workers, spread of knowledge and skills) for sending countries, there are social costs, which are often borne more directly by families or specific home bases of migrants. The absence of the migrant may have important negative effects upon the family, the separation and disruption of relationships and possible adverse effects on the education and socialisation of children, especially when women migrants have to leave young children behind. Conversely, remittance incomes provide crucial benefits, and typically enable families back home to lead better material lives than would otherwise have been possible, and may even contribute to expenses towards children's education, better health care for the sick and elderly in the household, and so on.

Much of the migration within the Asian region has been relatively short-term and focused on filling particular labour shortages. While this may have implications in terms of human rights and social justice, the economic advantages of such short-term migration for the sending country are significant. Short-term migrants are far more likely to send regular remittances back home, and when they return, they typically bring with them not only their accumulated savings but also additional skills and work experience which can be usefully deployed in the country of origin. By contrast, long-term migrants, especially those professional workers who migrate to developed countries, are far less likely to send money home, and even when they do, it is typically in the form of far more expensive and debt-creating capital flows such as non-resident financial investment. These long-term migrants are also usually associated with a net brain drain and the loss of resources that the home countries have expended on their education and skill formation.

Cross-border migration in Asia is highly gendered, with women migrants largely found in the service sector, especially in the domestic and care sectors, as well as in entertainment work. Male migration by contrast tends to be more in response to the requirements of industrialisation, in construction and manufacturing, as well as in semi-skilled services. Economic considerations are of course the primary reason for migration by individuals, especially women; but when this is large enough in sheer numbers, it has a substantial macroeconomic impact. Remittance incomes from migrant workers have shored up the balance of payments over the past decade in India and Philippines, to name just two countries. It is worth noting that female migrant workers are less affected by business cycle phenomena in the host countries, because of the different nature of activities in which they tend to be employed (dominantly domestic work and care-giving activities). Therefore, both female migration and remittances from such migration have in general been more stable than the male versions in the recent period.

Over the past decades, women migrants have come dominantly from three countries in Asia: the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In the Philippines, women migrants have outnumbered their male counterparts since 1992, and in all these countries women are between 60 to 80 per cent of all legal migrants for work. The majority are in services (typically low paid domestic service) or in entertainment work. While Filipino women tend to travel all over the world, women from the other two countries go dominantly to the Middle East and Gulf countries in search of employment. Around 56 per cent of the migrant workers from Sri Lanka are women employed as housemaids, who go to work dominantly in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Elsewhere in the region, restrictive regulations have reduced legal female emigration, but may have increased illegal migration, or trafficking.

Women migrant workers tend to be concentrated in the low paid sectors of the service industry, in semi-skilled or low-skilled activities ranging from nursing to domestic service, or in the entertainment, tourism and sex industries where they are highly vulnerable and subject to exploitation. They rarely have access to education and other social services, have poor and inadequate housing and living conditions. When they are illegal or quasi-legal and dependent upon contractors, they also find it difficult to avail of existing facilities such as proper medical care and are almost never found to organise to struggle for better conditions. In general, host governments tend to be less than sympathetic to the concerns of migrant workers, including women, despite the crucial role they may play in the host economy. Host country governments tend to view migrants as threats to political and social stability, additional burdens on constrained public budgets for social services and infrastructure, and potential eroders of local culture.

However, despite the growing significance of female migration in the region, there is little recognition by officialdom in the relevant Asian governments of this process, in terms of ensuring decent working conditions and remuneration for migrants. This may be why there is so little attempt across the region to ensure decent conditions of migrants, even in terms of ensuring their basic safety and freedom from violence. This is an important issue for women migrants in particular, since they are specially vulnerable to sexual exploitation, not only when they are workers in the entertainment and sex industries, but also when they are employed in other service activities or in factories as cheap labour.

There is often a fine line between voluntary migration and trafficking in women (and girl children). Trafficking is a widespread problem which is on the increase, not only because of growing demand, but also because of larger and more varied sources of supply given the increasingly precarious livelihood conditions in many rural parts of Asia. A substantial amount of trafficking of both women and children occurs not only for commercial sex work, but also for use as what is effectively slave labour in factories and other economic activities such as domestic or informal service sector work. It is true, of course, that the worst and most abusive forms of trafficking are those which relate to commercial sexual exploitation and child labour in economic activities. Nor is it the case that trafficking occurs only through coercion or deception: there is significant evidence to indicate voluntary movement by the women themselves, especially when home conditions are already oppressive or abusive, or at least voluntary sending by the households of such individuals, given the poverty and absence of economic opportunities in the home region. When there is employment, however badly paid, precarious and in terrible conditions, it may still be preferred to very adverse home circumstances. This in turn means that those who are employed through trafficking may not always desire to return home, if the adverse economic and social conditions persist. Also, the possibilities of return to home communities with safety and dignity are often limited, given the possibilities of being stigmatised and not easily reintegrated into the home society.

All this makes dealing with trafficking much more complex than is generally appreciated. From the point of view of attacking the causes, it is important to address the issues of economic vulnerability, marginalisation and attitudes to women, which encourage such movement. Environmental disasters and development-induced risks such as displacement are also known to play a role in increasing the incidence of trafficking.

Obviously, across the region there is need for more pro-active policies regarding migration. It is unfortunate that most government policies with respect to migration are designed with the male breadwinner model in mind, because this effectively excludes women, especially those who are trafficked, from the purview of regulation and protection by law. Very easy immigration policies can create routes for easier trafficking; but conversely, tough immigration policies can drive such activities underground and therefore make them even more exploitative of the women and children involved. The specificities and complexities of the trafficking processes, as well as the economic forces that are driving them, need to be borne in mind continuously when designing the relevant policies. Across the region, there is hardly any host country legislation specifically designed to protect migrant workers, and little official recognition of the problems faced by women migrants in particular. The same is true for the sending countries, which accept the remittances sent by such migrants, but without much fanfare or gratitude, and will little attempt to improve the conditions of these workers in the employment abroad. Women migrants, who typically are drawn by the attraction of better incomes and living conditions or by very adverse material conditions at home, are therefore in a no-woman's land characterised by a generalised lack of protection.

The picture of women's migration in Asia today is complex, reflecting the apparent advantages to women of higher incomes and recognition of work, as well as the dangers and difficulties associated with migrating to new and unknown situations with the potential for various kinds of exploitation. The desperation that drives most such economic migration, and the exploitative conditions that it can result in, should not be underestimated. But it is also true that the sheer knowledge of conditions and possibilities elsewhere can have an important liberating effect upon women, which creates a momentum for positive social change and gender empowerment over time.

Issues of public policy

The explicit aim of the Beijing Platform for Action was to "promote women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures, ensuring equal access for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services". To this end, it emphasised the need to "promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth through the provision of basic education, lifelong education, literacy and training, and primary health care for girls and women", as well as to "ensure women's equal access to economic resources including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets, as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including through the enhancement of their capacities to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources, inter alia, by means of international cooperation".

To what extent has any of this been achieved in the period since 1995? The current picture reflects at best a mixed outcome. There have been some clear gains from the relatively short-lived process of using much more women's labour in the greater export-oriented production of the region. One important gain is the social recognition of women's work, and the acceptance of the need for greater social protection of women workers. The fact of greater entry into the paid work sphere may also provided greater recognition of women's unpaid household work. At the same time, however, unpaid work has tended to increase because of the reduction of government expenditure and support for many basic public services, especially in sanitation, health and care-giving sectors.

Recent reversals in the feminisation of employment also point to the possibility of regression in terms of social effects as well. Already, we have seen the rise of revivalist and fundamentalist movements across the Asian region, which seek to put constraints upon the freedom of women to participate actively in public life. These can have destabilising effects on gender relations and on the possibilities for the empowerment of women generally. At the same time, advances in communication technology and the creation of the "global village" provide both threats and opportunities. They encourage adverse tendencies such as the commodification of women along the lines of the hegemonic culture portrayed in international mass media controlled by giant US-based corporations, and the reaction to that in the form of restrictive traditionalist tendencies.

In this context, there are important measures which governments in the region can – and must – take in order to ensure that work processes do not add to the complex pattern of oppression of women that continues in Asian societies today. More stable and less exploitative conditions for work by women cannot be ensured without a revival of the role played by governments in terms of macroeconomic management for employment generation and provision of adequate labour protection for all workers. Changes in labour market regulation alone do little to change the broad context of employment generation and conditions of work, if the aggregate market conditions themselves are not conducive to such change. More direct employment generation through increased public investment and provision of public services is useful; in addition, indirect employment generation through encouraging the expansion of activities which use female labour in stable and remunerative ways should be encouraged through fiscal incentives and other means. Given that across the region, external competitive pressures are creating tendencies for more exploitative and volatile use of all labour including women's labour, this has to be counteracted with pro-active countercyclical government spending policies.

FISHING IN THE STREAM OF MIGRATION: COMBATING MODERN FORMS OF TRAFFICKING WHILE RESPECTING WOMEN'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

*Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy**

The different forms of trafficking

A few decades ago the term trafficking had a very different connotation. As reflected in the reference “White Slavery”, trafficking was closely linked to the kidnapping and abduction of women and their sale to men for sexual slavery. The image conjured was one of women in shackles being herded together against their will to provide sexual services for men in countries other than their own. Let us not make any mistake. This type of trafficking still continues and is still a major problem in many parts of the world.

The case of Chamoli presents the nightmare of classical trafficking, the horrible reality that requires immediate attention and vigorous enforcement. Chamoli¹ fell in love with a young man when she was sixteen. He promised to marry her so she ran away with him to India. After they crossed the border, he took her to Poona where there was an older Nepali lady who ran a home with many young girls. She watched the old lady pay her boyfriend and then he disappeared. She was told that she had been sold into prostitution. She refused to accept her new trade. She was beaten into submission and subject to torture. Knives were held to her neck and her genitalia. She was not given any food for days. Finally, hungry and exhausted she agreed to provide sexual services. After a few weeks she was sold again to a woman from Bombay, she was given a cubicle that was the size of a narrow bed surrounded by a curtain. She served ten to twenty clients a night even when she was menstruating and there was no day of rest. She was not allowed to leave the brothel without the male bouncer and was given some pocket money for clothes and other expenses. Finally with the aid of a Nepali NGO Maiti Nepal, her brothel was raided and Chamoli was rescued. She was kept in an Indian Government home for seven months before being deported. She said the home was really a jail and the conditions were sometimes worse than the brothel. She had nothing to do from morning till evening. After seven months she was flown to Nepal and reunited with her family. By this time she began to have dizzy spells, diarrhea and vomiting. The Maiti Nepal doctors diagnosed her as having HIV AIDS. She was in an advanced condition and had only a few more months to live. The United Nations estimates that four million people were trafficked in the year 1998 it also estimated that seven billion dollars worth of profit off trafficking went to criminal groups.² The numbers continue to increase with each year.

And yet, Chamoli's case only heightens the modern dilemma. Modern day trafficking is more nuanced and complicated than earlier classical form, it is complicated by the fact today trafficking is closely linked to the question of migration. Saskia Sassen in a recent paper points to the growing presence of women in the fringes of the international global market. She argues, “the employment and/or use of foreign born women covers an increasingly broad range of economic sectors, some illegal and illicit and some in highly regulated industries. The key actors giving shape to these processes are the women themselves in search of work, but also, and increasing so, illegal traffickers and contractors as well as governments of home countries.”³

Traditionally women have provided certain types of services in the family and in the community. In the home, the ties of intimacy makes them provide these services for free whether they be sexual service for their spouses, or domestic service for the household or unskilled labour in family farms or family owned enterprises. At the same time they have also provided these same services to the greater community as low paid, low skilled workers. They provide sexual services in the form of prostitution which is probably the

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¹ Based on an interview, November 2000. The name has been changed to protect the victim.

² <http://www.hrlawgroup.org/site/programs/traffic.html>

³ Saskia Sassen, “Counter geographies of Globalisation :- The Feminisation of survival” in paper presented at Columbia University, February 2001.

most marginalized profession in the world. They provide domestic labour as badly paid domestic workers or housemaids. They also work in agricultural communities as low paid unskilled workers in fields owned by richer landlords or in urban areas or free trade zones where foreign investment is welcome.

This provision of these traditionally female services is not a new phenomenon. What is new, as described by many women scholars, is that in the modern world there is an international market for what used to be provided for the family, the local community or the nation-state. There is now an international market for prostitution where the service providers are of all nationalities and communities. There is now an international market for housemaids and low paid unskilled workers. In this international demand for female services, supply follows closely behind and women often migrate to provide their services to an international clientele. They cross borders in the transnational flow of labour. Many in the third world have argued that the push for transnational flow of capital from richer to poorer countries should also be accompanied by a more lenient attitude to the transnational flow of labour from the poorer to the richer countries. Women are caught up in these currents of migration and the problem of trafficking is complicated by the process of globalization and the transnational movement of capital, labour and goods.

The essentially novel feature of modern forms of trafficking is that women desire to migrate for many reasons and for this reason they become increasingly vulnerable to traffickers. This desire to migrate is often ignored in the traditional analysis of trafficking. Professor Saskia Sassen in her article sees the phenomenon of trafficking through the prism of our political economy. She argues that the Macro development policies followed by governments in pursuit of globalization may have led to unemployment and debt on the part of third world women. This in turn has led to women migrating in large numbers in search of survival. This search for survival is sometimes a nightmare as their vulnerability is exploited and abused by those who wish to profit off their bodies or their labour. Ironically this search for survival often empowers some women. Households and communities become dependent on their earnings and even governments come to rely on their foreign currency remittances.

Women's desire to migrate, to make a better world for themselves and their families cannot be ignored in our struggle to fight trafficking and traffickers. If we ignore women's survival strategies, we will force them into an even more exploitative reality. For this reason, conceptual clarity is absolutely essential before we discuss legislation and procedures for preventing trafficking. Trafficking must be seen in the context of migration and migration patterns. As one leader of an NGO said, "traffickers fish in the sea of migration."⁴ In this context any effort to combat trafficking must not violate women's freedom of movement.

Women leave their countries for many reasons. I have interviewed many women and they leave because of a variety of concerns. They want to escape poverty or discrimination at home. Many of them leave because they are in a desperate situation. In countries where there is polygamy, women leave their countries when their husbands take another wife. Often women who migrate come from communities and castes that suffer disabilities in their home country. They migrate to escape discrimination and oppression at home. In addition women seek to migrate from countries where there is armed conflict, where their physical safety and the safety of their children are not ensured. For a wide variety of reasons, the modern woman is ready to migrate, ready to cross borders in an attempt to survive and better her life.⁵ The first step in an anti-trafficking policy must therefore be attempts in the home country to better conditions for poor and exploited women and to raise awareness among these women about the pitfalls in migration. This is the most important strategy. Sending countries are often self righteous about the damage done to their women in receiving countries but the sending countries must also take part of the blame.

While women muster up courage to adventure forth in the modern world, despite their cultural upbringing in very conservative societies, there is no doubt that they often end up in situations of violence and abuse. What is needed is a principled and pragmatic way in which we can separate legitimate forms of migration from those that are violent or abuse the vulnerability of the women concerned. Trafficking is the concept that has been entrusted with this formidable task. Though it is theoretically easy to construct, in practice and in the real world, it poses enormous problems.

⁴ Told to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

⁵ These reasons for migration are based on interviews conducted with women victims of trafficking in Nepal, India & Bangladesh in November 2000.

For example, in some sending countries, desperate to stem the tide of women who are taken abroad into slavery-like conditions, immigration authorities are responding to the crisis of trafficking by insisting that women get the permission of their husbands or fathers before they get passports or leave the country. This is a very dangerous trend precisely because many women whom I interviewed left their countries because they wanted to escape from an abusive husband or father who seek refuge from family violence. By entrapping these women in situations of domestic violence and abuse, these well intentioned immigration policies are actually having a very negative impact on the lives of ordinary women. Any attempt to deal with trafficking must therefore not result in the denial of other basic rights. Prohibitions, preventing women from traveling or requiring that women get their husband's or father's permission to travel, fundamentally violate women's rights under the pretext of protecting women from violence and abuse.⁶

Another conceptual issue that deserves clarification is that we must separate the regimes that protect children from those that vindicate women's rights. Trafficking in children requires a more draconian approach that places the state in the role of guardian and protector. Children who have been trafficked require the state to protect them and take care of them until they return home to their families.

However, the provision of such services should respect the rights of the child. They should not become shunted children kept for long years in government homes without any future. Reconciliation with the family should also be done with caution since many of these children fled from their homes because of domestic abuse. Unless such abuse is recognized as a factor and there is a guarantee that it will cease, children should not be unconditionally returned to their parents.

The situation of women is sometimes very different. Women as adults often make important decisions with regard to their lives. While reconciliation with the family must be the primary strategy of any trafficking involving children, the case of women has to be dealt with differently. Many of the women who have been trafficked do not want to be rescued, do not want to stay in state homes and do not want to return to their families.⁷ In my interviews with women I discovered that many of the women did not want to return home, some of them did not want to be named or rescued. In some countries they had formed independent trade unions to protect their rights. In this context, it may be necessary for the state to respect their wishes and protect their rights without imposing solutions that will only make life more miserable for them. For this reason, the regime that protects children with its emphasis on family reconciliation and rehabilitation should be different from a regime that emphasizes the human rights of women and their autonomy to make decisions about their own lives.

The third and perhaps most controversial conceptual issue is that legislation on trafficking should be delinked from regimes regulating prostitution. One reason for this delinking is that women, children and boys are being trafficked for a wide variety of purposes other than prostitution. They are being trafficked for forced labour, forced marriage, camel jockeying, begging etc... Nevertheless prostitution remains the primary purpose for trafficking and therefore poses important dilemmas. One is often asked whether prostitution is sex work or violence against women. In surveying different realities around the world, the answer appears to be, it depends; it depends on context and it depends on the person.

Implications of the lack of international consensus

One major reason why an international approach to trafficking should not make prostitution a central concern is the pragmatic realization that there is currently no international consensus on the correct approach to take with regard to the regulation of prostitution. There remain countries throughout the world that criminalize prostitutes and criminalize prostitution. This moralistic approach to prostitution exists in most Islamic and catholic states as well as in many states in the United States of America. There are other countries that take their lead from the 1949 Convention on the Suppression of Trafficking. Most countries in South Asia for example take this approach. The Convention, based on the perspective of the Abolitionist Movement, criminalizes those who exploit prostitution but treats the prostitute herself as a victim without any criminal liability. A recent addition to this framework, coming from Sweden, is the criminalising of the client

⁶ Bangladesh & Nepal prevent women from going to the Middle East for employment. Bangladesh requires a husband or a father to give permission before a woman receives her passport.

⁷ Based on interviews in Nepal and Bangladesh, November 2000.

along with others who profit from the exploitation of prostitution. Other countries follow the regulationist model that legalizes prostitution through a system of licensing and allows prostitutes to see themselves as sex workers who should have labour rights as well as other economic and social rights protected by law. Netherlands and many countries in Europe follow this approach. Some women's groups and NGO's reject all these frameworks, arguing for laws and strategies that respect the rights of sex workers focusing on issues of violence and abuse and the prevention of AIDS. The United Nations itself is divided, depending on which agency is taking the lead. The *Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* and the CEDAW committee in recommendation 19 seem to take the abolitionist approach. However the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women with its language of "forced prostitution" and the ILO in some of its reports seem to take the view that there is the possibility of legitimate sex work.

These divisions among different schools and different approaches are deep and acrimonious. They depend on radically different attitudes toward the human personality and human sexuality. The abolitionist approach is premised on the deep ambivalence that early feminists had toward human sexuality. Seeing sexuality as a site of exploitation and abuse, feminists like Catherine McKinnon were always suspicious of sexual expression outside the realm of intimate partners. They fought campaigns against prostitution, against pornography and sexual harassment in the workplace. They demanded a legal, criminal approach that required accountability and punishment of all the individuals involved with the sex trade. They demanded an environment where women would be free from the fear and abuse. The feminist legacy of laws that today create an environment where women are accorded more respect and dignity are in great part due to the tireless efforts of these women.

Younger feminists, who have benefited from the environment created by the older women activists, see things a little differently. In the postcolonial era of "human agency", they are interested in taking a second look at the so-called female victim. They write about sexual agency, female desire and the female body. For many it is time to move beyond the moral Puritanism of the early feminism to a more nuanced understanding of human sexuality. This requires looking at sexuality as a site for women's empowerment and agency.⁸ In this discourse, the prostitute becomes the sex worker, an individual endowed with agency and rights. In this worldview, the prostitute does not exist to be rescued by the outside world but demands her rights as a worker and a human being. She defines the terms of her salvation, forming trade unions and agitating for human rights.

Trafficked women's own aspirations

In Bombay, I came across a group of older women prostitutes or sex workers who reflected this worldview. They were initially Devadasis, women from the South of India who were given to temples for prostitution. They had moved into the slums of Bombay where they earned a living as sex workers. They explained that they belonged to a caste that traditionally gave their younger daughters into temple prostitution.⁹ They had left the temple and migrated to Bombay in search of a better life. Here, they explained they earn enough to spend on their children and were in a position to save enough money to send some home to their parents who were taking care of their children. Their main concerns were health protection, HIV AIDS and schooling and amenities for their children. They said they were reasonably happy. They work at night, play cards during the day and had few complaints. They became extremely offended when it was suggested that a rehabilitation centre be set up and that they be trained in another occupation. They made it very clear that they did not want another occupation and they did not want the state or the police in their lives. They only wanted protection from HIV/AIDS and some provision for their children. They were considering forming a trade union like the Sex Workers Trade Union in Calcutta.

In this context, therefore, we are faced with a reality which earlier groups of feminists refused to confront because the numbers of women who were content with sex work were so small to warrant attention. However, with regard to international migration, it is true that many women do migrate, knowing they are going into sex work. I have interviewed women who were actually happy with their position as migrants and sex workers. Many of them did work in factories during the day and sex work at night to earn extra money.

⁸ For a good analysis see Duncan Kennedy, "Sexual Abuse, Sexy Dressing and the eroticization of Domination" in D.K. Kennedy, *Sexy Dressing etc.. Essays on the Power and politics of Cultural Identity*, Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 126.

⁹ Based on an interview, November 2000.

Many women agree to cross borders for sex work but when they get to their destination they are deceived by the conditions and find themselves in slavery-like conditions. The case of the Polish doctor is a case in point.

She was a victim of trafficking. She qualified in Poland as a doctor but during the state socialist era, doctors earned a paltry sum of money. When Eastern Europe opened up, some of her clients had gone for sex work in Germany. They painted a rosy picture of the life of the sex worker and they claimed to have made an enormous amount of money as call girls. The doctor who had to take care of a large family, made inquiries and then agreed to go to Germany to do sex work. She was smuggled across the border by a group of Traffickers, many of them as the same community as the doctor. When she got to the brothel it turned out to be a nightmare. There were constant beatings, not enough food, her documents were taken, she was not allowed to leave the house and she had to service an inordinate number of clients. When she complained they assaulted her mercilessly. Since she did not have documentation and was smuggled into the country, she was terrified to go to the police. Finally, she escaped and went to the Polish consulate where she was initially refused any special treatment until she begged and pleaded and managed to get in touch with a friend who sent her money for her air travel back to Poland. She had not told her parents and family that she had gone for sex work and therefore her return was quite a traumatic one. Whatever questions we may have about the doctor's capacity for moral judgment, we cannot ignore the fact that many women go ready for sex work as respectable call girls and are terribly deceived about the conditions of work.

The largest category of women, however, are those that agree to migrate to do domestic service or entertainment and are then deceived into becoming sex workers. Though some women are drugged and abducted across borders, the vast majority of women are deceived. Though they wish to migrate to better their lives and are promised lucrative jobs, when they accept and cross the border willingly, they find out too late that they have been sold into prostitution. Those who know they are going into sex work, find out that they must be in a brothel, living the life of a sexual slave, being subject to terrible violence and abuse. Perhaps the worst case of brothel conditions was the case in Thailand, where dozens of sex workers were killed when a building housing a brothel was burnt down. Chained to the bed they had no chance of escape.

Another large category of women are those that cross borders to pursue domestic service or to work in factories. They agree because they are promised lucrative jobs but when they cross the border they find themselves in slavery like conditions, with debt bondage, their passports confiscated and their movement restricted. These women are often without any recourse since they have little capacity to escape the slavery like conditions.

Ironically, however, despite all this abuse and violence, the situation is very complex when you actually interview the women. The majority of the women and girls interviewed by a government survey in India did not want to be rescued. Only 43% wanted to leave their brothels.¹⁰ The majority wanted to stay in the brothel but wanted the conditions to improve. This is an indication of the type of violence and oppression from which they were escaping when they decided to migrate or cross borders. In addition, they felt they had nowhere to go since most of them did not want to return home or face their families. For everyone concerned with immigration and refugee law, the truth is that many trafficked women are escaping conditions that are even worse than the reality they face as sex workers in a brothel. The nature of persecution and suffering they had to undergo before they voluntarily leave a country is often ignored in the literature on trafficking.

Responses of the international community

The importance of different instruments

States around the world have begun to respond to the crisis posed by increasing trafficking in women and children across their borders. However, their efforts raise disturbing dilemmas for law-making and law enforcement at the international level and within national borders.

¹⁰ Central Social Welfare Board, op cit.,

During the last few months of 2001, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, added protocol to prevent Suppress and Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The document was a consensus document after many hours of deliberation. The Protocol defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”.

Though the definition is a mouthful, it is a major development in the law of trafficking. The earlier international document on trafficking, the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, defines trafficking very differently. The Convention states in Article 1,

“The parties to the present Convention agree to punish any person who to gratify the passions of another Procures, entices or leads away, for purposes of prostitution another person, even with the consent of that person Exploits the prostitution of another person, even with the consent of that person”.

In contrast to the earlier approach to trafficking, the protocol of the year 2000 makes significant changes. Firstly, the Protocol distinguishes between women and children. For women there must be transfer or transportation across borders but it must involve some form of coercion or abuse of vulnerability. With regard to children, fraud, deception coercion or abuse is not necessary. Mere recruitment, transportation or transfer is enough¹¹ to incur criminal liability.

In another very important change, The Protocol appears to imply the transport and transfer with free and full consent of an adult victim for purposes such as prostitution is not Trafficking. Transportation and transfer without violence or abuse will not be interfered with. The burden of proving lack of consent will not be on the victim since the Convention states that if abusive means are used, the consent of the person shall be irrelevant.¹²

The Protocol has a complex approach to the definition of Trafficking being linked to prostitution. The interpretive notes make it clear that the term sexual exploitation may be interpreted by each country according to its own experiences thus allowing for the differences in approaches to prostitution and sexual services.

In addition, the Convention links trafficking to a wide variety of purposes and the definition is not only connected to the exploitation of prostitution. It includes among other end purposes, such practices as forced labour, removal of organs or other slavery-like practices. The language of the protocol itself is a compromise, reflecting the various positions of diverse groups and interests. While the earlier approaches to trafficking linked in clearly and only to prostitution and sexual exploitation, the modern approach to trafficking is to recognize diverse ends with regard to the slavery like conditions that are manifest in the world.

The responses of individual states

Besides uniting on international definitions of trafficking, countries around the world are taking national measures to combat trafficking. Cynics argue that these radical measures may be prompted to recent U.S. legislation that requires countries to take efforts against trafficking to qualify for certain aid requirements. However, all these laws have serious human rights applications. Though one lauds the effort and the intention behind these pieces of legislation, the consequences of such action may actually make life more unbearable for the women and girl victims. An example of the type of legislation was one that was proposed in one of the Asian countries.¹³ The draft prepared by the police department, criminalizes the

¹¹ Article (3) © of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

¹² Article (3) © of the Protocol.

¹³ provided by the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, November 2000.

prostitute for the first time. This will ensure that the woman victim will become the target of police action and not the trafficker since she is the visible product and the easier person to target. The draft also gives the police draconian powers to arrest, detain, search and seize material. Most of the provisions violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It also shifts the burden of proof so that the accused has to prove that he is innocent. The vesting of enormous powers in a police force usually results in acts of impunity that target women victims. In India under The Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act, though the law is structured to deal with Traffickers, 80% of the cases filed are under soliciting, resulting in the reality that the woman victim is the person who is arrested most of the time. Being the most visible symbol of the sex industry, draconian powers to the police usually implies that the woman victim will be the one to be harassed, detained and questioned.

In many countries, the state has always taken on the historical role of being the protector of the female victim. The worst manifestation of this protection ideology is the protection homes set up in South Asia for women victims of Trafficking. Women and girls rescued from trafficking are kept in these homes “for their own protection”. The conditions are jail-like, and the women and girls cannot leave the premises. They have very little to do, the sanitary conditions are often appalling and they languish for years on end until the authorities decide what to do with them.¹⁴ They await case dates and repatriation dates but since they cannot leave the premises none of this is done with their consultation. They are the forgotten women and in interviews often plead with outsiders to let them out. Meanwhile, traffickers are usually given lesser sentences and are allowed out into the community at a much earlier date. As a result, very few of the women working in brothels and guest houses want to be rescued since they feel life in the government home is sometimes worse than in the brothel.

Though new strong laws are being adopted throughout the world, the criminal justice system in the different countries does not seem ready to deal with the problem of trafficking. Even though trafficking is an international phenomenon, except for the European Union, there is no joint co-operation among police in the different countries.

Each operates in its own sphere with a few isolated meetings throughout the year. The arrest and conviction rates also reveal a major problem with regard to criminal justice. The police in many parts of the world do not have any special training manuals or procedures with regard to trafficking. In some countries there are now special units to deal with trafficking within the police department. However, the major problem in this sphere remains allegations of police corruption.¹⁵ Women and girls interviewed in many parts of the world, especially in Asia and Africa spoke of police complicity in trafficking. They often spoke of money changing hands in front of them, of brothel owners being warned of raids. One girl spoke of how she ran away to the police station in Thailand but the brothel owner came to the station and paid the police and took her away. She was beaten senseless after the event.¹⁶ Corruption was seen as endemic in this trade and unless serious efforts are made from the top to punish this type of behavior sending a message that such behavior will not be tolerated, it is unlikely that much will change. However, pressure and vigilance by local level NGOs working trafficking has helped to curtail police corruption in many states.

The legacy of the judiciary in many societies is also mixed with regard to the prosecution of traffickers. The conviction rate throughout the world is abysmally low. The police argue that the reason for this is that the judiciary is patriarchal and insensitive to the issues. The members of the judiciary on the other hand, present the point of view that the evidence has not been gathered properly and since the punishments are now draconian demanding long sentences, it is unconscionable to convict someone without the proper evidence. The draconian laws may therefore have the opposite effect of not resulting in convictions.

Given the strong link between trafficking and migration in the modern world, trafficking as a crime poses major challenges for refugee and immigration agencies. Unless there is what I may call “trafficking awareness” on the part of the immigration officials around the world, the problems may be compounded. The reality is that much of the activism around the world in trafficking has been prompted by immigration officials and police taking the lead trying to prevent illegal immigration first, and the abuse and violation of

¹⁴ Based on a visit to The Loluah Home in Calcutta November 2000.

¹⁵ Based on interviews, November 2000.

¹⁶ Based on interviews, November 2000.

women second. In fact nightmare realities may result from this quest to fight trafficking through the control of immigration. Let me give you a case. As UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, during the summer I have interns from all over the world working on my report in Sri Lanka. One such intern in the year 2001 was from the New York University Law School and was an American citizen of Pakistani descent. When she was leaving the country to fly to England, the British immigration official advising the Sri Lankan authorities looked at her passport. He stared at her and her passport and then became convinced that she was a trafficking victim. He claimed that the US passport was forged. She pulled out her Ohio's drivers license, her NYU student card etc... but he was still convinced that she was a trafficking victim. She was pulled out of the queue and put into a detention cell at the airport. Since it was the middle of the night she had to wait six hours till the morning in the cell. Thereafter she was allowed to make phone calls and managed to contact friends and the US Embassy. About 12 hours later, a US embassy official came to the airport and she was cleared.

In fighting trafficking an enormous amount of discretion is vested in those who monitor cross border movements of people. In actual fact, the ordeal women suffer while pending immigration formalities merely compound their problems. International anti-trafficking norms establish mechanisms by which victims of trafficking can return to their countries of origin without punishment by either government.

But summary deportation is the rule, and the process in many parts of the world is corrupt, abusive and a terrible ordeal.

When one deals with issues of trafficking, it is important to realize that the women who are trafficked, according to the modern definition, is a victim survivor not a perpetrator. In many systems of justice, she is treated as a perpetrator, subject to harshness, cruelty and insensitivity. If we are to truly fight trafficking in a meaningful way, we must learn to focus on the victim survivor, her needs and concerns as well as the concerns of the state in preventing the crime of trafficking. For example even though she is a victim survivor of trafficking, we cannot presume that she wants to go home. It is important that immigration and refugee judges have procedures that allow them to ascertain why the women left in the first place, what was the nature of the abuse, violence or oppression she faced at home that made her become a victim of trafficking. Summary deportation cannot be the answer given the complicated nature of the individual histories. There must be more meaningful and humane ways with which to deal with the trafficked victim.

In many European countries and the United States, the current policy is not summary deportation but the victim survivor is given a few months to decide whether she wants to prosecute her traffickers. She is then given a visa for the period of the trial and at the end of the period of the trial she is eligible for a visa on humanitarian grounds. The link to prosecution puts an extra burden on the woman and there is increasing pressure from women's groups that a victim survivor of trafficking is allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds regardless of whether she prosecutes her traffickers.

Currently proposed models

There are currently various models being proposed for the struggle against trafficking. A pure law and order approach is inadequate and may actually compound the problem for women. The hallmarks of a successful; approach are:-

Special government departments and units in the police and immigration authorities are set up to fight trafficking and they have international linkages. These units work together, coordinate information and activity in the country and in the region. These units are specially trained on the human rights of trafficked victims survivors.

Laws are being drafted in keeping with modern definitions of trafficking. This would include a respect for women's right of migration and a delinking of trafficking definitions from an emphasis solely on prostitution. In addition the legislation is framed respecting the woman's rights of migration and the human rights of women at every stage of the process. This would include listening to their voices and their concerns before repatriation, rehabilitation etc...

Training programmes for the police, immigration officials, prosecutors and the judiciary on trafficking and other related crimes especially in areas such as how to handle the female victim survivor of trafficking abuse.

Women victims of trafficking are not summarily deported. They are allowed to remain in the receiving country on humanitarian grounds.

The police and immigration authorities work closely with women's NGO's set up to work with women victims of trafficking. The moment a woman is identified at a brothel or an immigration counter, or at a brothel, she is handed over to these NGOs. These NGOs run shelters and have legal and psychological counseling for these women. They will also assist the woman in her dealings with the police, the prosecutors and the judiciary. The partnership between NGOs and the police is an essential element in the success story with regard to successful convictions of traffickers and the humane treatment of victims.

Conclusion

Sending countries are also responsible for fighting trafficking with a humane face. Again, the partnership with NGOs is essential, and women should be handed to relevant NGOs when they are seen to be trafficking victims. In addition, when women are deported or when they return to the country, there must be special programmes for them, ascertaining their medical position and whether they wish to return to their families or live a life on their own. The foreign consulates should have officers who are skilled in dealing with issues of trafficking and abuse. Finally, measures should be taken to fight the long term problems that cause women to leave home countries in the first place. Abuse and violence in the home, unemployment, discrimination and oppression are matters that require effective action on the part of the sending countries if we are to deal with trafficking in terms of long term solutions. Special awareness programmes should be conducted to ensure that women are not abused or deceived.

In many of our attempts to fight trafficking, we must not forget our first concern – the woman victim. All these measures are made meaningful only because they allow women to live a life of respect and dignity. In promoting these measures we must keep this in mind. We must validate the lives of these women and give them the respect they deserve. The women involved may be victims but they are also human beings with aspirations and experiences. Any measure to be successful must learn to understand their needs and desires. In their suffering they have insights and ideas from which we can benefit. Too often they become pawns in some one else's game. Their voices and interests are compromised as States uphold sovereignty and stem the tide of migration. Whatever measures are taken should give centre place to the rights of the woman victim. Immigration laws, refugee procedures, and asylum practices must surely ensure and protect their right to live in dignity.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: DEFINING AND BUILDING A GENDER-RESPONSIVE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN THE ESCAP REGION

*Dr. Nancy Hafkin**

Introduction

This issue has been included on the agenda of this meeting upon the recommendation of the Expert Group Meeting in Preparation for the High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Review and Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (March 2004) which identified information and communication technology as one of the emerging challenges in the region, vis-à-vis the Beijing Platform for Action (BpfA) and the Outcome Document of the Global Review of the BpfA. It should also be recalled that the five-year review of the BpfA found that gender differences and disparities had been ignored in policies and programmes dealing with the development and dissemination of improved technologies, resulting in women benefiting less and being disadvantaged more by technological advances. The five-year review recommended that actions needed to be developed and implemented to avoid new forms of exclusion and ensure that women and girls have equal access and opportunities to new developments in science and technology (DAW, 2001: 294-295).

Why the concern about gender and the information society in the ESCAP region?

The Asia-Pacific region is going through a period of rapid and far-reaching economic and social change, driven particularly by accelerating globalization and the transition to knowledge-based economies, built on the foundation of ICT. Among the impressive developments in the application of ICT are the Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor, the 15 newly established digital universities in Korea and 67 on-line colleges established by conventional universities in China. Technology-enabled service industries are growing at dizzying rates. However, most of the growth has been sharply uneven, concentrated in richer countries and in urban areas within countries, in a diffusion that mirrors economic and social divides. There is a concern about deeper and wider exclusion of women in the ESCAP region with the further growth of the information society.

...In reviewing and developing policies and corresponding strategies and programmes which encourage innovation, access and the development of advanced skills and channel new technologies towards the most urgent needs of the world's poor people, it is critical to ensure that the gender dimensions are equally addressed (ESCAP, 2002: 2, 4).

ESCAP has clearly articulated its position on the gender digital divide:

Closing the gender divide is a UNESCAP priority enabled through gender-responsive ICT capacity development for women's organizations, policy recommendations, research publications, and mobilization of international, civil society and governmental organizations. It is essential to focus on the gender dimensions of the digital divide, not only to prevent adverse impact of the digital revolution on gender equality and to enhance women's access to the benefits of ICT, but also to ensure that ICT becomes a central tool for women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality. Policies need to ensure that the gender perspectives of ICT access and use are fully addressed so that ICT actively promotes gender equality and ensures that gender-based disadvantages are not created or perpetuated. (<http://www.unescap.org/esid/GAD/Issues/ICT/index.asp>, accessed 29 August 2004).

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Before proceeding to consider the main areas in the construction of a gender-responsive information society in the ESCAP region, this paper will set forth some basic definitions of terms and issues under discussion and review the deliberations of the recent World Summit on the Information Society on gender.

What is information society?

Information society is a society in which people interact with technology as an important part of life and social organization to exchange information on a global scale. It is a society influenced and impacted by the changes taking place in the information, communications and technology (ICT) sectors and a society in which advanced technologies are used to improve living and working conditions for all citizens. It is a society is a term that is conversant with – and reliant upon – information and communications technology.

The information society is concerned with both life in general as well as the world of work. It is not limited to urban elites that are most closely associated with computer use. It is about the use of information technologies as tools to improve the lives and livelihoods of all citizens and, thus, is closely associated with the alleviation of poverty.

What do we mean by a gender-responsive information society?

A gender-responsive information society is the corrective to the gender digital divide. There is a gender digital divide in both developed and developing countries, although its attributes are different according to levels of economic and social development. It is particularly evident in developing countries. Ironically, where it is most pronounced, it is also statistically invisible. It recognizes that gender-blind information society does not respond equitably to the needs of both men and women, but rather that specific attention must be paid to gender if gender-positive results are sought (Hafkin, 2002).

What are ICTs?

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are the tools that people use to share, distribute and gather information and to communicate with one another through the use of computers and computer networks. Commonly, they are understood to include computers, communication technologies (including radio, television, video, telephone, fax, mobile telephony, and Internet), networking and data processing capabilities and software. The phenomenon of convergence means that telecommunications, broadcasting and ICTs are becoming increasingly linked and interchangeable. Additionally, the definition of ICTs is coming to encompass both new and older information technologies, as the new work together with the old to further information exchange and communication (e.g. the linkage of Internet and radio). New developments in ICTs, particularly in wireless communication and the use of SMS in mobile telephony, are cutting the costs and extending the reach of the new technologies to areas and populations that were previously un- and underserved, thereby increasing the possibilities of access for poor women and for all women living in rural areas. IT (information technology) is frequently used to refer to the information technology industry; it has also come to be used interchangeably with ICTs, in that virtually all information technology is inseparable from communications and networks. Therefore it goes without saying that IT is ICT.

Gender and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Despite a process that was rife with months-long struggle over the inclusion of gender issues (see Hafkin, 2004), the conclusions of World Summit on the Information Society (phase I, Geneva, 2003) contained many positive references to gender issues. Analysis of the main recommendations proposed by the Gender Caucus, an informal, multi-stakeholder group, shows that they were all incorporated into the WSIS Declaration of Principles (WSIS, 2003) and Plan of Action (WSIS 2003a). The table below shows the main recommendations of the Gender Caucus followed by the text from the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action that reflects those recommendations.

Gender as a fundamental principle for action.	<p>Our challenge is to harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, namely . . . promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. . . (Declaration of Principles, para 2)</p> <p>To this end [women's empowerment and full equality in all spheres of society and all decision-making processes], we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end (Declaration of Principles, para 12).</p>
Equitable participation in decisions shaping the information society.	<p>We affirm that development of ICTs provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors, in the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality of all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes (Declaration of Principles, para 13).</p>
New and old ICTs in a multimodal approach.	<p>Traditional media in all their forms have an important role in the Information Society, and ICTs should play a supportive role in this regard (Declaration of Principles, Media, para 55)</p> <p>Encourage and promote joint use of traditional media and new technologies (Plan of Action, Information and communication infrastructure, para 9I).</p>
Designing ICTs to serve people.	<p>Applications should be user-friendly, accessible to all, affordable, adapted to local needs in languages and cultures, and support sustainable development (Declaration of Principles, ICT applications, para 51)</p> <p>Facilitate access to world's medical knowledge and locally-relevant content resources' to promote men's and women's health (Plan of Action, E-health, para 18b)</p> <p>Encourage the adoption of ICTs to improve and extend health care and health information systems to remote and underserved areas, recognising women's roles as health providers in their families and communities (Plan of Action, E-health, para 18e)</p>
Empowerment for full participation.	<p>Literacy and universal primary education are key factors for building a full inclusive information society, paying particular attention to the special needs of girls and women (Declaration of principles, Capacity building, para 4)</p> <p>Work on removing the gender barriers to ICT education and training and promoting equal training opportunities in ICT-related fields for women and girls. Early intervention programmes in science and technology should target young girls with the aim of increasing the number of women in ICT careers (Plan of Action, Capacity-Building, para 11g).</p> <p>Governments, in collaboration with stakeholders, are encouraged to formulate conducive ICT policies that foster entrepreneurship, innovation and investment, and with particular reference to the promotion of participation by women (Plan of Action, Enabling Environment, para 13I)</p> <p>Encourage the development of best practices for e-workers and e-employers built, at the national level, on principles of fairness and gender equality, respecting all relevant international norms (Plan of Action, E-employment, para 19a)</p> <p>Promote teleworking to allow citizens, particularly in the societies developing countries, LDCs, and small economies, to live in their and work anywhere, and to increase employment opportunities for women . . . (Plan of Action, E-employment, para 19c)</p>

(Continued)

(Continued)

Gender Caucus recommendations

Text adopted by the World Summit

Research analysis and evaluation to guide action.

Promote early intervention programmes in science and technology that should target young girls to increase the number of women in ICT careers (Plan of Action, E-employment, para 19d).

Strengthen programmes focused on gender-sensitive curricula in formal and non-formal education for all and enhancing communication and media literacy for women with a view to building the capacity of girls and women to understand and develop ICT content (Plan of Action, cultural diversity and identity, para 23 h)

In cooperation with each country concerned, develop and launch a composite ICT Development (Digital Opportunity) Index. It could be published annually, or every two years, in an ICT Development Report. The index could show the statistics while the report would present analytical work on policies and their implementation, depending on national circumstances, including gender analysis (Plan of Action, Follow-up and evaluation, para 28a).

Gender-specific indicators on ICT use and needs should be developed, and measurable performance indicators should be identified to assess the impact of funded ICT projects on the lives of women and girls (Plan of Action, Follow-up and evaluation, para 28d).

WSIS-phase 2

Women have already begun organizing for WSIS Phase II, to be held in Tunis in November 2005. There is interest in strengthening the gender principles articulated in the Declaration of Principles, Many gender advocates feel that the gender principles included in the Declaration of Principles (viz., – ‘Women are key actors in the information society. We are committed to ensuring that the information society enables women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes) are much weaker than that the statement contained in an earlier draft of the declaration. Emphasis is also on working to ensure that delegations implement the gender-related recommendations in the Action Plan and identifying lacunae in gender issues that remain to be addressed in the Declaration and Action Plan. Some of these are:

- exploitation, violence against women and sexism on the Internet
- explicit recognition of the use of traditional communications technologies
- references to women and/or gender equality in the suggested indicators/targets for 2015
- references to women and decision-making in ICT policy, in addition to the references to ‘all stakeholders.’

Major gender and information society concerns in the ESCAP region

All of the WSIS recommendations are pertinent to the ESCAP region. However, there are issues and points of emphasis that are of specific importance to the region that we will now proceed to examine. These are listed below, not necessarily in priority order.

- Employment
- ICT for Development (ICTD)
- Access
- Capacity building
- Content

- Sexual exploitation and harassment on the Internet
- Statistics and indicators
- Gender in ICT policy

Employment

Outsourcing

The ICT industry employment picture in the ESCAP region overall is male-dominated, with women working at lower levels and concentrating in data entry, word processing and transcription work. This reflects training patterns, where young women tend to be the large majority of those enrolled in office application computer courses, but a small percentage of those studying programming or computer engineering.

Upon enlarging the picture, one sees that the rapidly developing area of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)¹ has changed many aspects of women's IT employment and has become the major issue in women's information society-related work in the ESCAP region. BPO is the single largest technology-enabled employer of women and one in which women are earning significant livelihoods in several countries. However, it is not without controversy.

In the first place, the growing trend towards outsourcing of information processing work pits developing countries against developed. In the present run up to the presidential election in the US, the loss of jobs to outsourcing has become a major political issue, with each candidate trying to establish himself as more opposed to outsourcing than the other as voters who have lost their jobs to overseas deployment enter the voting booths. The reality, however, is that US-based, and other, multi-national corporations, are unlikely to reverse their increasing use of outsourcing for both software and hardware development as well as BPO, the service segment of IT work of which women are the vast majority.

Beyond the controversy at the level of macro-economic globalization issues are the questions of its meaning for women's lives and work. Does BPO employment constitute gender-responsive participation of women in the information society? Views on this subject diverge widely. Critics of the young women working in call centres focus on the self-denying cultural aspects, where the pressure is on to learn American accents, popular speech and culture and to adopt American first names as well (where Deepti becomes Dottie). Such employment has been termed 'dumbing down of a generation' because:

It is mind-numbing and deskilling-the knowledge and skills acquired in school and college are inapplicable here. The working is boring but stressful, and girls are expected to retain their composure and patience even in the face of verbal assaults by irate customers (Gaerlan, 2004).

In addition, women do not profit from the flexibility that ICTs are supposed to represent, but rather become tied to shifts that match U.S. peak call times, but that frequently come after midnight in India, the current centre of BPO work. Worse off than the women working in call centres are those doing as home-based technology work in the unorganized sector. These women, found in substantial numbers in India and the Philippines, do medical and legal transcription and maintenance of daily accounts for small businesses located in northern countries. (They are frequently termed 'virtual assistants'). While able to work at home, they perform their work in addition to all the standard domestic labour expected of married women (the call centre employees are generally unmarried women living with their parents), for low wages relative to those working in the organized sector and under insecure employment contracts (if contracts exist at all). Women working at home have to make substantial investments to secure their work- the purchase of computers, paying for electricity and Internet connectivity and personal sacrifices -staying up all night to meet deadlines. The numbers of women in home-based IT employment, however, are relatively small compared to those in BPO.

¹ Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is also known as Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES).

In the organized sector, there are also the issues of women in management and levels of women's employment. BPO employment is not professional information technology employment. The work in hardware and software development that is contributing so much to the Indian economy, through companies such as Wipro, Tata and Infosys, as well as to the economies of other ESCAP nations, is highly male-dominated. Very few women are employed in this area. Few, also, are the women managers in the BPO area.

On the other hand, highly regarded scholars of women and ICTs in Asia such as Swasti Mitter regard offshore outsourcing of information processing work as a major opportunity for the economic empowerment of women, pointing to 'unprecedented benefits' offered to women working in these areas in India, Malaysia and the Philippines, with salaries generally running at the \$5000/year level-a near fortune for women in poor countries where the per capita income is less than \$500 per year. According to Mitter, 'This is one of the cases where it is possible to say with confidence that globalization has yielded gains for some developing countries and women in them' (Mitter, 2004:3). Aware of the burnout syndrome, where women quit from the stress, anxiety and mental fatigue of BPO work, Mitter maintains that the benefits to women in such employment are higher than the costs. She cites BPO as a positive dimension of globalization for which ESCAP region national governments should create a policy environment to capture a greater share of the global market in information processing and ensure its sustainability and replicability. They also need to be pro-active to assuage the fears of job losses and the growth of protectionism in developed countries and by pointing out that the United States and other developed countries are net beneficiaries of such trade flow. The area of ICT services and back-office work in India is expected to swell five times to US\$57 billion, employing four million people and accounting for 7 percent of India's GDP by 2008 (Kripalani and Engardio, 2003).

For gender advocates, the challenges are to be aware of the pitfalls in such employment, to support women workers in their desire for decent working conditions and to ensure that women retain an equitable share of employment in each phase of technological change.

Self employment

Digitization of information and the Internet have made it possible to sell goods and services beyond the local market. The possibilities of e-commerce for women entrepreneurs in Asia have been enthusiastically touted, including women craftspersons in the informal sector. In Cambodian villages and Banaskantha, India, for example, women are using ICTs for their economic empowerment through e-marketing. However, the obstacles to success are still great. The majority of women in Asia still live in rural areas where connectivity is either rare or non-existent. The list of other obstacles that women entrepreneurs who want to take up e-commerce face is fairly daunting:

- Lack of information and education
- Lack of knowledge of Internet languages
- Lack of credit
- Insufficient business and technical skills
- Lack of information on trade and customs regulations
- Difficulties in quality control
- Difficulties in managing payments over the Internet
- Lack of information and confidence around security issues
- Unsupportive government regulation policies (Mitter, 2003)

E-commerce aside, women entrepreneurs, who head 35% of small and medium enterprises in Asia, can make profitable use of ICTs in ICT-enabled businesses, as well as in using ICTs to facilitate existing businesses (Hafkin and Taggart, 2001). One successful example of an ICT-enabled business is that of the smart cards used by Indian women milk collectors in Rajasthan. The cards, used to record the amount of milk women sell to milk distributors, as well as the quality and fat content of the milk, include picture identification, serve as a non-transferable bank book and eliminate the "Dhudhwala," the urban middleman, thus increasing profits for rural women. Women in the Smart Card milk project have raised their incomes by up to 45%. (*Times of India*, 23 March 2000). Such businesses have the advantages of low capital and skill requirements. Other similar possibilities exist in the telephone rental business, as in Grameen Village Phones, and the operation of telephone/fax/Internet kiosks and STD booths.

Grameen Village Phone is frequently cited, but remains the best case in point. Grameen Phones in Bangladesh, which sets up Village Phone Operators to resell wireless telephone services has contributed greatly to women's economic empowerment and has tremendously increased women's cellular telephone use. Where women were operators (and they are the majority of operators), 82 percent of the users were women; with men operators, women comprised only 6.3 percent of Grameen phone users. (Cite Don Richardson, Hafkin, 2001).

Box 1: Promotion of self-employment: Korea and Uzbekistan

Korea

The Ministry of Gender Equality has organized programmes at 12 Korean universities for women who want to work in an e-business or to start Small Office-Home Office (SOHO) businesses. The Asian Pacific Women's Network Center (APWINC) at Sookmyung University trains women to work in IT, including as freelancers and in their own businesses.

Uzbekistan

A project about to be launched by UNDP in rural Uzbekistan targets women, who constitute the majority of entrepreneurs, focusing on capacity building in ICT management, business planning, fund-raising and project management to transfer two existing business incubators into ICT Business Units. The incubators will provide training and other ICT services to local communities. ICT training and website development will also be provide to women in micro-finance institutions and micro-entrepreneurs (UNDP and UNIFEM, 2004:21).

Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICTD)

The Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society (2000) adopted at the G8 summit, signalled a new global focus on the development potential of ICT and the hope that ICTs could be leveraged by poor countries, communities and individuals to leapfrog into a more empowered, equitable and prosperous future. This was not the beginning of a connection between ICT and development, which had been strong from 1995-2000, but rather the beginning of a movement away from using ICTs to accomplish specific project objectives to trying to articulate and establish the linkage between ICTs and poverty alleviation. Many development actors – including bilateral, multilateral, multi-national corporations and NGOs have – embraced the idea that ICTs can be important tools for addressing global and national inequalities. In this approach, generally known as ICT for Development (ICTD), ICTs go beyond technological tools to become development enablers. Some detractors are sceptical about the role of ICT in poverty reduction, while others argue that basic needs should be met before expenditures are made on ICTs. Still others maintain that the evidence is not yet in to establish ICTD outcomes. However, the experiments and efforts in this area have become prolific. Most importantly for gender concerns, the linkage of ICTD with development challenges such as poverty alleviation and elimination of gender inequality has meant that gender concerns have been mainstreamed in ICTD. Talking about ICTs for rural poverty reduction in Asia and the Pacific, Prof. John Urea wrote:

...at least a more equitable distribution of access to ICTs is widely regarded as a means toward the reduction of poverty, especially in rural areas. . . . There seems to be plenty of evidence that the key to poverty reduction in general is the reduction of poverty among women and their empowerment in terms of status and responsibilities within communities (Urea, 2003).

Gender advocates picked up this theme at Beijing +5, urging UN agencies to go beyond the task of assisting the use of ICTs for networking and media to that of exploring the potential of the technology for economic empowerment of women in poorer countries (United Nations, 2000). Thus, ICTD has become a major development theme, with its application to women's empowerment as a strategy for poverty reduction as a frequent subtheme.

Box 2: Case study in ICTD and Women's Empowerment- Korea and India

ICT for Women's Empowerment in Korea

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry encourages the use of IT by women farmers through onsite and mobile computer education and technical support services. Real-time information on market prices is posted on the web. The web site also operates a shopping mall for agricultural products. Technical assistance is available to farmers in building personal web sites.

The Kyonggi Province Program for women IT professionals (<http://www.womenspro.org>) provides training and lifelong education for women tailored to the different stages of women's lives. Unemployed women, women heads of households and handicapped women who want to enter the work force are trained in business incubation and capacity building (including gender training). About 600 women have completed the 10-12 month course as IT specialists, of which nearly two-thirds have either found employment or started their own businesses. The course made numerous accommodations to meet women's needs and daily schedules.

Datamation (India)

Datamation Foundation employs over 1400 employees, one-quarter of whom are women, across 24 locations within India providing ICT services to the leading national and multi-national firms while generating employment in ICT for the poor. Datamation services include document management, scanning and imaging, data conversion and data entry, application programming, e-services, portal development, e-commerce solutions and geographical information system applications. Datamation collaborates with *Nari Raksha Samiti* (NRS), an organization that assists women from marginalized backgrounds in Delhi to secure supportive and stable employment in the ICT sector.

Women are already working at Datamation in software development. Network administration and maintenance is other potential field where demand is on the rise. Datamation is aiming to increase the demand and supply of female workers in the IT and related sectors. It plans to offer hostel facilities or rental houses to those workers who otherwise could not afford to live in urban areas like Delhi.

Many projects have sprung up in the ESCAP region on this subtheme, but for the most part they are small scale, and not yet replicated, yet alone evaluated.

The latest entry into this category is a project undertaken by Microsoft under a new \$1 billion global initiative called Unlimited Potential aimed at empowering rural women through the use of technology.² The programme aims to create socio-economic opportunities for women through training in ICT skills at Community Technology and Learning Centres. The curriculum for the India problem has been development in Hindi and aims to train nearly 6,000 women with less than high school education in slum areas of Delhi and rural districts of Madhya Pradesh. They are being trained for jobs in data entry, teaching computer skills and call centre offices, as well as to integrate ICTs into existing businesses. Microsoft is working with Tarahaat, which has been a pioneer in India in giving girls computer education and assisting them in becoming wage earners (*The Hindu Business Line*, 2004).

Access

The most basic gender issue is access, which is inextricably linked to the availability of the necessary infrastructure. In virtually all developing countries, communications infrastructure is weaker and less available in rural and poor urban areas, where the majority of women live. Simply by being the majority of the population in rural areas, women have a smaller chance than men to access new technologies. It is likely that phone lines are fewer, that there are no relay stations for mobile phones and no earth stations for satellites. As UNIFEM and the UNU/TECH noted: 'Women, with their special responsibilities for children and the elderly, find it less easy than men to migrate to towns and cities. The urban bias in connectivity thus deprives women, more than men, of the universal right to communicate' (UNIFEM and UNU/TECH, 2000). As in the rest of the world, there is an urban bias in women's access to and use of ICTs in Asia and the Pacific (AWRE, 2001).

² The project itself is funded at US\$323,000.

Women tend to have less access than men to those ICT facilities that do exist. They also have less disposable income to spend on communications than men. Frequently, information centres or cybercafes are located in places that women may not be comfortable frequenting or that are culturally inappropriate for them to visit. Since most communications facilities in developing countries are in offices or involve shared public access, women also have problems of time. Given gender-defined multiple roles and heavy domestic responsibilities, their leisure hours are few, and the public centres may not be open when women can visit them. Or they may be open evenings, when it is problematic for women to visit them and then return safely to their homes in the dark. Their mobility (both in the sense of access to transport and ability to leave the home) is also more limited than that of men. Some accommodations that may be needed to ensure gender equity in access and use of ICTs for women are adaptation of schedules to suit women's hours and availability of women support staff and trainers.

Capacity building

Women and girls are poorly placed to benefit from the information and knowledge economy for several reasons: they have less access to scientific and technical education specifically and less access to education in general. They also have less access to skills training and development, which will enable them to gain IT employment, and when they do work in the IT sector, as we have seen, they work at lower, lesser-paid levels. These disadvantages have largely prevented women and girls from benefiting equally from the opportunities that IT can bring. Yet, conversely, IT also offers many opportunities for women and girls to gain the education and technical skills required for them to participate equally in the IT economy. It also offers possibilities to gain education that might previously have been inaccessible to them.

Throughout the world, there are problems in attracting young women to science and technology studies. The picture globally – and the ESCAP region is no exception – is a steady decrease in the percentage of girls and women in S&T as one moves up the educational structure, beginning with the primary level. The 'leaky pipeline' is a concept that has been used to refer to the steady attrition of girls and women throughout the formal S&T system, from primary education to S&T decision-making. The leaks are found at every stage of the process, resulting from a series of barriers to girls and women, and can be categorized in four categories:

- **Cultural and attitudinal barriers**, such as perceptions about the role and status of women, where emerge across countries, despite widely different circumstances.
- **Situational barriers** include lack of family commitment, lack of partner support and living in rural or isolated areas.
- **Qualification barriers:** lack of formal math and sciences education or experience in computer programming skills is often perceived as a barrier, both by admissions departments and by the students and teachers.
- **Finally, institutional barriers** block women's access to S&T education. These include the lack of female teachers and assumptions of male teachers about capabilities of women students; inflexible admissions, selection and entry requirements which do not take into account women's varying educational backgrounds, approaches and abilities; and heavy attendance requirements for practical skills and laboratory work which are more difficult for women to meet in view of their family and domestic responsibilities.

The result of the leaky pipeline is insufficient numbers women entering the critical tertiary-level with sufficient background to pursue studies in science and technology. This is crucial, for even in OECD countries where women are at or approaching parity in Internet use with men, they are not acquiring the skills and qualifications to use information technology at high levels and to move into scientific, technical and management positions in the field. Tertiary-level education is the prerequisite for women to be able to develop ICT applications and to shape gender-sensitive ICT solutions. As the ICT use continues expand rapidly throughout the ESCAP region, women should be encouraged and supported in pursuing jobs such as IT analysts and software programmers. Malaysia is an example of a country where women have had success in this area, coming close to parity with men as software programmers (Ng, 2001).

Ehwa Women's University and Sookmyung Women's University in South Korea both emphasize information technology, and in that countrywomen now hold 35 percent of IT high-level positions. Regrettably, there does not seem to be sufficient support for women in tertiary-level ICT education in many

other countries of the region. While the recent UNESCO report on higher education in Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO, 2004:19) cites the continuing shortages of specialists for the knowledge and information industries, there are no references to encouraging women to fill these vacancies.

Support and encouragement is needed for the increased participation of women and girls at every level of scientific and technical education. This will increase national capacities in science and technology and contribute to increased standards of living. Initiatives to achieve this include:

- Encouragement of girls and women to continue their education past primary levels.
- National and university programmes to increase the recruitment and retention of girls and women, especially in science and technology.

Box 3: Case studies: Information and Communication Technology for women's capacity building

Between 2001 and 2002, the Ministry of Information and Communication (Korea) trained one million housewives in computer and Internet use. The Ministry of Labour runs computer training for unemployed women, especially those who are heads of households. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development has a project to enhance IT skills of girl students from elementary through high school.

Training computer technicians (India)

The World Bank, under its Third Technician Education Project is training personnel for key areas of economic growth, with a focus on information technology. In India women are the majority of students in technical schools and are highly represented in the technical work force. The technician education project provides scholarships and hostels for women students, giving them the opportunity to study in their home states, thus accommodating the resistance of parents' to sending young girls off long distances from home to study.

Cisco Systems Networking Academies

The Cisco Systems Networking Academy Program is a successful IT training programme that reaches women and has the potential to reach large numbers of women in developing countries. It consists of a global training programme that teaches students to design, build, and maintain computer networks, preparing them for industry-standard certification as networking professionals. To increase female enrolment it uses female role models in advertisements and promotional materials, and the curriculum includes a gender-equality training module. It has also formed partnerships with international organizations, non-profit organizations and NGOs to address the gender gap the IT field and to promote women in IT.

Women continue to be an overlooked target group for IT skills development, despite their substantial participation in the labour force. ICTs can provide innovative ways for women to obtain and update skills for equal participation in the knowledge economy. The experience of the Cisco Networking Academies and other initiatives indicate that women successfully take advantage of opportunities for high-level technical education. Among the measures that would support this would be the reservation of places for women in skills training programmes, and women-targeted training.

Content

Little Internet content is available that meets the information needs of women in developing countries in a form they can use. The amount of content in local languages, which women tend to use exclusively more than men, is miniscule. If ICTs are to be useful to women in developing countries, they must meet the test of relevance. If this is not passed, ICTs will remain of little interest and value to rural women. Barriers persist such as the high number of illiterate women, and the large number of women in the ESCAP region who do not read the international languages that predominate on the Web (English, German, French, Chinese and Japanese being the most widespread). Few of India's half-billion women know any of these languages, for example. Numerous projects, however, are tackling the literacy and language barriers, as well as lack of computer skills. Educated women, as well as young women (the 'daughters') and community organizations can also help other women cross the digital divide.

Sexual exploitation and harassment on the Internet

One of the most negative aspects of ICT is the pernicious and misogynist use of the Internet for women's sexual exploitation and harassment. This includes trafficking of women through the Internet, pornography, sexual harassment and use of Internet to perpetuate violence against women. Regrettably, increasingly graphic pornography is easily available to all who seek it and even to those who don't. A number of cases have appeared recently where men use web sites to harass women and violate their privacy. Women need secure spaces online where they can be safe from harassment and exploitation. Legislation is needed that prevents ICTs from threatening human rights; at the same time, however, it is a very delicate balance between protecting women's rights while at the same time not giving governments *carte blanche* to institute state intervention and censorship over new communication technologies. This is a difficult area that requires further study and innovative solutions, in which women must participate.

Statistics and indicators

There is a paucity of sex-disaggregated information on the information society. The collection and analysis of information on the differential impact of ICTs on men and women is a necessary prerequisite to the achievement of a globally equitable information society.

Standard presentations of ICT statistics pay no attention to gender differentials. To cite one example of this, the World Bank Development Data Group publishes 'ICT at a glance', with breakdowns by country. No breakdowns by sex are shown for any of the indicators, despite the fact that more than half of the indicators are based on demographic data that could be disaggregated by sex. As far as most official statistics are concerned, the gender digital divide is invisible and unmeasured.

Few countries collect gender ICT statistics, and those that do so are typically the countries where the gender digital divide is least marked. Very few countries have official surveys, such as household surveys, to collect gender-disaggregated statistics. And as with statistics and indicators in general, gender statistics are much more available in rich countries than in poor countries. Those countries where the gender digital divide is most marked are also those where the digital divide in general is hardest to document. It is difficult to bring this issue to the attention of policy makers in these countries because of the lack of reliable data on which to make the case for the inequitable access to and use of ICTs by women in developing countries. This includes ICTs not only for communication, but also for conduct of business (including e-commerce) and employment in the IT industry itself.

Until 2003, the only sex-disaggregated ICT data published by the International Telecommunication Union, the major compiler of statistics on ICTs, was that on female employees of telecommunications administrations. This in itself was a relatively recent addition to the ITU's annual questionnaire. Only one-third of countries were able to supply this data, and a number of developed nations, including France, Germany, Japan and the United States, were unable to do so. However, this data is not very significant because it simply reveals that in most countries the majority of positions within the traditional Public Telephone Operators –that of telephone operators- are held by women. A high percentage of female personnel among telecommunications staff is not an indicator of gender equity in employment the telecommunication industry. The statistic tells us nothing about the comparative access to or use of ICTs by men and women. It also tells us little about employment in the ICT industry.

Progress has been made this year at both the ITU and at the United Nations statistical office in the inclusion of gender ICT indicators. ITU has now increased to three the number of sex-disaggregated indicators included in its annual questionnaire to member States and in its *Handbook of key indicators of the telecommunications/ICT sector*, adopted by the third World Telecommunications/ICT indicators meeting held in Geneva in January 2003. The two new indicators are:

- Female Internet users as a percentage of total users
- Female Internet users as a percentage of females

The available data on female Internet users as a percentage of total users for ESCAP countries illustrates that data tends to be available only for richer countries; and that female Internet use tends to correlate closely with GDP.

Female Internet users as % of total Internet users, 2002

<i>Country</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Hong Kong	49
Thailand	49
Australia	49
Singapore	47
New Zealand	46
Republic of Korea	46
Japan	41
Philippines	41
China	39
Malaysia	36
Indonesia	35

Source: International Telecommunication Union website. http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/at_glance/f_inet.html.

There are several things amiss with this data. First, because it is virtually the only quantitative data that is easily available on gender on ICTs for the region, it is frequently cited. Yet, it is highly misleading. The list is heavily weighted towards wealthy countries and does not contain India, a very important case in terms of gender and ICTs. There is no data at all from the CIS countries, from the small Pacific island countries or from poorer countries from South and South East Asia. The only available data leads us to conclude that the situation of women and ICTs looks good. Women Internet users, as a percentage of total users in the Asia region, range from 35 percent as a low to virtual parity – 49 percent in three countries. As we have seen, Internet use, both among men and women, tends to correlate positively with income and urban locations. A much more significant indicator would be the number of women as a percentage of the total- studying computer science or computer engineering at tertiary level. That data, however, is unavailable. Thus, the absence of data can lead to specious, if not erroneous, conclusions about gender and ICTs.

In a recent study undertaken for UNDP of nine Asian countries to empirically assess linkages between ICTs and human development using Millennium Development Goals as benchmarks, the authors concluded that despite the absence of data at national levels, the role of ICTs in promoting gender equality was perceived as positive (UNDP, 2004).³ They based their argument on deductive reasoning, citing that ICT allows women to take up contract job work (home-based working) while sitting at home. However, the evidence cited above, seems to indicate that home-based IT work further increases the workload of women and adds to an already inequitable gender division of labour. Clearly, the availability of empirical data would allow gender advocates to make the case more strongly for the protection of women working under these conditions.

In this same study, on the index of social sector targeting that reflects the performance of countries in promoting ICT for the well-being of its people, allowing the benefits of the new technology to reach larger sections of the population, the authors conclude is that China ranks highest, followed by India and Malaysia (UNDP, 2004). The targeting may in fact reach large numbers of men, but few women. But without sex breakdowns of the data, there is no way to determine conclusively that ‘human’ development means gender-equitable development.

Gender in ICT policy

There are two main groups that need to be aware of the importance of gender in ICT policy. ICT policy makers, who tend not to be women, need such awareness, but gender advocates need it as well. There is a widespread tendency on the part of gender advocates to disregard ICTs, particularly ICT policy, as a technical area that does not concern women, particularly women who live in rural areas. However,

³ Data from the following countries were used in the exercise: China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

virtually all ostensibly technical issues have gender implications.⁴ Additionally, women need to put on the agenda of ICT policy and strategies the issues that concern them, such as those that are discussed in this paper. Inter alia, these should include:

- Dealing with the large number of women illiterates
- Reducing cost of access for women whose incomes are lower than those of men
- Increasing access to technology by linking ICTs with other technologies
- Using ICTs to empower women and alleviate gender inequalities

If women and gender advocates do not put forth these issues, it is highly unlikely that they will be considered. ICT policy will be elaborated as gender-blind, but the results will be far from gender neutral: it will likely have negative impacts upon women that were not foreseen. And as a likely result of this invisibility in policy, gender issues do not appear in implementation of ICT either.

The recent study on national ICT policies in six ESCAP region countries (Australia, Japan, India, Malaysia, Philippines and Republic of Korea) showed that national IT policy frameworks and strategic plans were 'largely silent on gender or women-focused concerns. Gender is not an explicit theme in national IT plans' (Ramilo, 2002; UNESCAP, 2002). The only exception in the six countries was the Republic of Korea that has taken serious steps to integrate a gender-equality agenda into the national IT policy framework. In addition, Australia is gathering gender-disaggregated data related to its ICT and e-commerce policies.

Policies in areas other than ICT may also positively affect women and ICT –e.g. national industrial and labour policy may promote women's employment in the IT industry. Education policies may encourage women's scientific and technological education, and thus have a significant impact on their preparedness to enter the labour market. Gender advocates need to examine and follow these policies as well.

Intra-regional differences

In describing about the gender digital divide in the vast ESCAP region, we have already noted the divide between countries between urban elites and rural poor, between rich countries and poor. However, there are countries in the region where the gender digital divide is particularly pronounced, beyond those demarcated divisions. The area where ICT has had the least penetration in women's lives to date is the Pacific, where according to the 2003 Gender and ICT Forum "while there are so many success stories of ICT4D projects managed by women in highly populated developing countries, none exists in most small island developing countries of the Pacific". Lemalu Leilua found that "over 99 % of women [in the Pacific] do not know what ICT is all about, have never heard of the terms computer, Internet or cellphone. (Leilua, 2003). However, some developments are taking place. Recently a mobile women's community radio project recently began operations in Fiji (Peace Women, 2004). After the Pacific, the sub-region where ICTs least touches women's lives is the Caucasus and Central Asia. Here most of the gender and ICT activity is in the area of advocacy by women's organizations for gender equality which marked most developing country gender use of ICT between 1993 and 2000; for the most part it has not yet passed into the realm of ICTD (UNESCAP, 2001). These sub-regions stand in contrast to the high levels of women's employment in ICT-enabled industry and involvement in ICTD projects in South Asia and the rapid growth of every aspect of ICT use by women in South East Asia.

Overall, the aim is to build a gender-responsive information society throughout the ESCAP region are throughout the region, along lines elaborated by WSIS:

A people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where *everyone* can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge (WSIS, 2003).

⁴ See Hafkin, 2002a 'Gender issues in ICT Policy in Developing Countries: an overview,' paper delivered at UNDAW Expert Group Meeting on Information and Communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (Seoul, November) for a detailing of more than 20 gender aspects of ostensibly gender-neutral, technical ICT policy issues.

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ENGENDERING GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES¹

*Dr. Socorro Reyes (Philippines)**

Situation of Women in Politics Worldwide: The Numbers Speak for Themselves

In 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 189 governments committed themselves to “take measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making” and to “increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.” To fulfill these strategic objectives, the principal action they pledged to take was to “establish the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administrative entities, and in the judiciary, including, *inter alia* setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions.”

Five years later when a review was made by the UN’s Division for the Advancement of Women for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Beijing +5, it was found out that women continue to be grossly underrepresented in the higher echelons of decision-making in government, the private sector, the judiciary, the media, and in academic institutions. Regional and international organizations including the United Nations system have similarly failed to achieve gender balance. Nothing much has changed since then. Specifically, in the Asia-Pacific region:

Women account for 15.1% of the membership of national legislatures² and 17.5% of local legislative councils.³

Five out of the 41 countries (12%) have women heads of state: Bangladesh, Indonesia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.⁴

Women are 5.6% of local Chief Executives.⁵

Women’s Political Representation in the Asia-Pacific Region (2004)

<i>Political Positions</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Members of Parliament	15.1%
Heads of State/Government	12.0%
Local Councillors	17.5%
Local Mayors	5.6%

Cultural and Structural Barriers to Women’s Political Participation

Women all over the world face formidable *cultural and structural barriers* in entering the political arena. These are deeply rooted in patriarchy which views politics as a male preserve allowing women entry only in limited numbers and usually at local levels of governance. Patriarchal values and norms permeate as well the *structures or mechanisms* which decide who will run for office, how money will be spent and what rules will apply in determining winners.

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¹ Prepared for UNESCAP High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes, September 7-10, 2004.

² The global average is 15.4%.

³ International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), 2004.

⁴ <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/statistics.htm>.

⁵ IULA, 2004.

In *patriarchy*, politics is about who gets what, when and how with men as the big league players. It is about male domination of the decision-making process and control over the allocation of scarce goods and resources. Politics is commonly equated with corruption, manipulation and domination or as they say in other countries with “gold (money), goons (force) and guns (violence)”. The costs and security risks for women and their families are far too high and those committed to developmental change would rather engage in social action and civic work. There are of course women who would brave the odds and contest elections.

Political parties, electoral system and campaign finance are *structural barriers* to women’s political participation. As gatekeepers, *political parties* determine who are in and out the candidate list and most of them lack openness and transparency in making these decisions. *Electoral systems* can enhance or reduce women’s chances of winning elections. Single-member, majority system are generally unfriendly to women while proportional representation, multi-member systems are basically favorable to them. The **amount of money** needed to win an election is the single biggest disincentive for women to run for office as it is with men. But campaign contributors are more inclined to invest on male candidates who usually have more chances of winning.

Overcoming Barriers: The Strategic Framework

For women’s full and equal participation in decision-making structures and processes at all levels of governance to be attained, a strategy is needed which explores focused ways of overcoming the cultural and structural barriers to gender balance in political representation.

A holistic, unified, integrated approach to promote and enhance women’s political participation will provide strategic direction to the diverse activities on women’s political participation being undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders from government, civil society and the donor community. So much needs to be done in overcoming cultural and structural barriers to women’s political participation that advocacy to be effective must have a well-defined framework, clear agenda, time-bound activities, as well as measurable results.

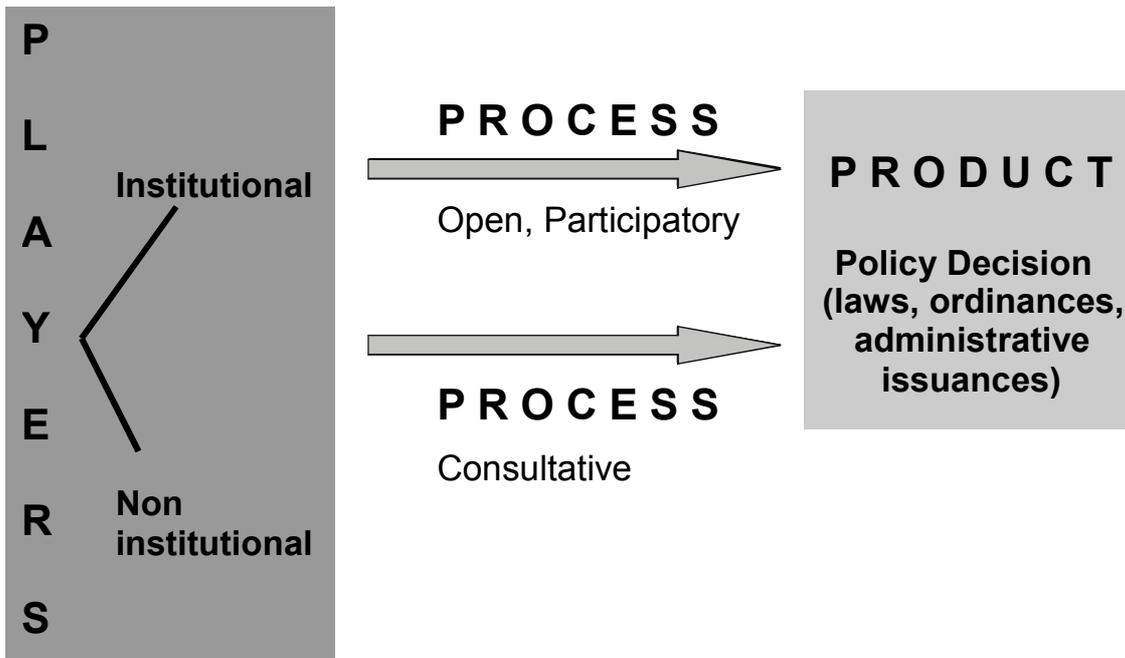
The strategy for engendering governance to be used in this paper uses the players-process-product framework. Governance is defined as “*the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences*”⁶ Based on this definition, governance has essentially three components: *the players, the process and the product*.

- The *players* are the institutional and non-institutional actors involved in the formulation and implementation of decisions. *Institutional players* are the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government at both national and local levels while the *non-institutional players* are civil society organizations, political parties, religious groups, labor unions, professional associations, social movements and the private sector.
- The *process* refers to how decisions are made, its open, participatory, and consultative nature and the kind of information used to come up with the policy solution.
- The *products* are the *policy decisions or measures* adopted to address goals such as reduction of poverty, gender equality, environmental protection and management, respect for human rights, rule of law, efficient public service delivery, and peace and security.

Having defined governance, the next question is women’s participation in governance. Using the players, process, product framework this means ensuring that:

- Women have equal access as men as *players* or participants at all levels of economic, political and social decision-making. This means promoting the full, equal and informed participation of women and men in public life.
- The *process* of decision-making from planning to implementation involves women and reflects their distinct conditions, needs, access to and control over resources and development benefits.
- The *products or policy decisions* such as laws, ordinances, administrative issuances are responsive and sensitive to women’s issues and concerns.

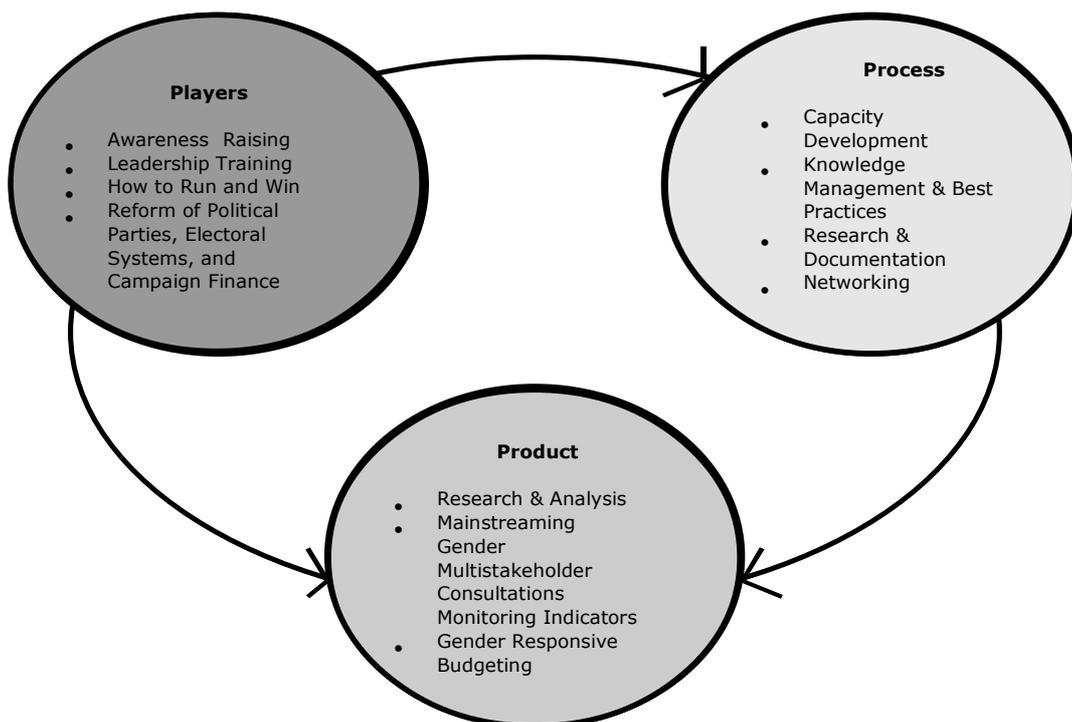
⁶ UNDP Human Development Report, 1997.



The Strategy

In terms of *players*, several methods can be used to increase women’s representation in decision-making bodies: awareness-raising; leadership training as well as preparing them to run and win; introduction of quotas; and reform of political parties, the electoral system and campaign finance. To enhance their participation in the decision-making *process*, several measures can be taken: capacity development, knowledge management, research and documentation and networking. For them to come up with *products* or policy decisions that will address gender in development objectives, they would need assistance in policy formulation, budgetary allocation, monitoring of implementation and evaluation of outcomes.

The Strategy



The Players

Governance requires the **full and equal representation of women in the formulation and implementation of social, economic and political decisions at all levels**. This is affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations (Preamble, Article 8), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many other international instruments including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well as the International Convention on Women's Political Participation and more recently, the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 and the Outcomes Document (2000). It is a widely recognized fact that women should not only **be present in decision-making bodies but be there in critical numbers with the ultimate goal of achieving gender balance in political representation and participation**. Towards this end, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) mandates the **"adoption of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women."**⁷

To increase women's representation in decision-making bodies particularly the legislature, the following measures can be implemented:

1. Awareness Raising

Awareness-raising about women's political participation targets men inside and outside government as well as the women themselves. Male aversion or limited tolerance for women in politics basically stems from the perception that a woman's place is in the home and her job is to run and manage the house. Not a few women share this view but there is also great trepidation in entering an arena known to be only for the mighty, wealthy and powerful.

Three messages that can be strongly emphasized in awareness-raising are: 1) **transformational politics** is about empowering and enabling women to participate in open, democratic decision-making processes; 2) **political participation is a human right** and government has the duty and obligation to ensure its fulfilment including efficient updating of electoral rolls, simplification of process of issuance of identity cards and prompt action against those who prevent women from voting; and 3) **quotas are temporary special measures** meant to accelerate de facto equality between women and men and quota at any level of government to be meaningful must be at least 30%, the critical mass defined as the number of women that will be able to shape and move forward the women's agenda.

The **media campaign** to promote awareness of women's political participation will be conducted on three levels: print, radio and electronic media. It is geared to remove misconceptions, and biases and create new attitudes and perceptions about women's participation in politics. They will convey the three messages about new or transformational politics, political participation as a human right and the importance of 30% temporary reservation for women.

2. Leadership Training and "How to Run and Win"

Leadership training especially of young women is strongly recommended by the Beijing Platform for Action. Preparing young women to assume leadership positions is crucial especially in societies where they were reared to be submissive, obedient and married off at an early age. Very few young women in these countries manage to defy social conventions and rise to positions of leadership.

Training women to run and win must be institutionalized. This should include: 1) factors to consider in deciding to run; 2) developing a campaign plan; 3) the campaign process; 4) poll watch: observing the conduct of voting and counting of ballots; 5) what to do after elections: losers and winners.

3. Reform of Political Parties, Electoral Systems and Campaign Finance

Structures such as **political parties, electoral systems and campaign finance** can make or break women's chances of winning elections. In the obstacle course to winning an elective seat, the first hurdle for women are the **political parties** which decide who gets in the door and under what conditions. **Political party reform** means adopting a policy that will require political parties to ensure that their structures and

⁷ Article 4, CEDAW.

processes are open and participatory, removing all barriers that directly or indirectly, discriminate against women. As well, parties should incorporate gender in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.

Quotas are known to increase dramatically the number of women in decision-making positions. In countries where women have reached a critical mass in their national parliaments such as Sweden and South Africa, political parties have voluntarily adopted *quotas* for women in their party list using the zebra method where every other slot is assigned to a woman. But quotas can also be established through national legislation or constitutional mandates.

The *electoral system* or the method and rules used for determining winners is the next hurdle. Extensive researches conducted by feminist scholars show that women have comparative advantage of getting into formal positions of power through a *proportional representation system*. Countries in the world where women constitute over 30% of parliamentarians such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Iceland, Germany, New Zealand, Mozambique and South Africa have electoral systems based on proportional representation. In the experience of most countries, women have very limited chances of victory in an open election where the district is small and apportioned only one seat which goes to the individual candidate who gets the highest number of votes. But if the district is large and allocated several seats distributed according to the number of votes received by political parties, women usually increase their representation.

Finally, there is the omnipresent question of *money*—women do not usually have access to resources and since campaigns generally cost a fortune, they are eliminated from the race by default. Campaign country contributors would rather hedge their bets on male candidates who they believe have better chances of winning than women candidates. Campaign financing systems will work better for women if they provide for adequate and efficient public reporting and accountability mechanisms. Transparency is needed with respect to sources of funding and public reporting of accounts by candidates, political committees and parties. Campaign reform can also require political parties to apportion a greater percentage of campaign funds for women as well as mandate them to set up a special campaign funding mechanism similar to the US Democrat Party's Emily's List.

The Process

Governance is not only about getting more women in formal positions of political authority. *Numbers are necessary but not a sufficient condition to address gender disparity*. It is about participation, effectiveness and impact. Women should have the capacity to participate substantively in the discussion and deliberation of policy issues not as beneficiaries/objects of development programs but *as agents/subjects of developmental change*. Their *effectiveness* is indicated by the extent to which they are able to influence institutional rules, norms and practices and consequently shape the policy agenda and decisions about the use and allocation of resources. Their *impact* on the other hand will be seen in the entitlements, capabilities and rights they are able to secure for women to redress gender disparities and change their lives, especially the poor women's lives.

The process of governance does not only involve women elected or appointed to public office. It encompasses women's broad range of citizenship that includes activists advocating for gender sensitive and aware policies to address a wide spectrum of economic, political and social issues and problems. Women's participation in governance requires an open, participatory, enabling decision-making environment that provides not only the political space to be seen but for their voices to be heard as well.

Women who get elected to positions in the legislative or executive branch, whether local or national often complain about their inability to participate in the decision-making process due to any or a combination of the following: lack of knowledge about how the system works, inadequate information about policy issues, unwillingness to play the power game, and negative attitudes of their male counterparts.

To respond to these articulated problems, the process strategy will include:

1. Capacity Development

The most common reason why women in formal positions of political authority fail to participate in the decision-making process is their lack of competence and expertise. For effective women's political participation, *an integrated, systematic post-election training program* is needed. A training design based

on a careful and thorough needs assessment has to be developed by institutions and individuals with vast experience and expertise in the field, building on what has already been earlier developed instead of reinventing the wheel. Popularized teaching materials have to be drafted and tested for suitability and applicability to the needs of the target audience.

Post-election training to perform their legislative and representative functions is as crucial as training to get elected to office. In a number of countries, women in both local councils and national legislatures are in politics for the first time and need intensive and extensive training specific to their level of preparedness for the job as well as their particular individual needs.

Elected women officials particularly legislators usually need a training curriculum that includes: a) gender sensitivity and awareness-raising; b) agenda setting; c) constituency servicing; d) advocacy; e) gender-responsive budgeting; and f) executive-legislative relations or legislative oversight.

2. Knowledge Management and Best Practices

Knowledge management of strategies, approaches and methods used by women “to get in the door” will be inspiring and instructive. The lessons learned from their experiences and words of advice for other women ready to walk the same path will be most useful to increase women’s representation in decision-making bodies particularly the legislature. Case studies on best practices for women’s political participation and knowledge management of the work being done by women politicians is vital. The codification and management of knowledge will build an institutional memory that women can tap for sources of information, insights and advice on how to travel the road of politics and avoid the pitfalls of those who came before them. As well, it will provide evidentiary proof of women’s competence and capacity for developmental change.

3. Research and Documentation

Nothing can better inspire women politicians to participate actively in the policy process than to show proof through research and documentation that women’s presence in legislative bodies, especially in critical numbers make a difference. While the ways of measuring impact differs from country to country on the basis of socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics, there is general agreement that women bring to their work different insights, approaches, and even target goals.

The following can be used in documenting how women’s presence in law-making bodies make a difference: 1) ways of working; 2) context of decision-making; 3) conduct of and language used in debates; 4) change in discourse; and 5) nature of policy decisions.

4. Networking

Networking is an effective means for women to learn and draw strength from each other. The bonding usually unleashes positive, creative energy that motivates and inspires them to do their work better. A community not only of women politicians but of knowledge and practices is created and solidarity assumes a new meaning and dimension.

Networking can be done inside and outside the legislature. Women’s Political Caucuses cutting across party lines can be formed within the legislature. Women are able to pool their resources, plan strategies, and develop synergies. The experience of most women parliamentarians show that unless they get organized, their presence is hardly felt whether in committee meetings or plenary sessions. Cutting edge legislation related to different forms of violence against women such as rape, domestic violence, prostitution and trafficking have been passed through the collective efforts of the Women’s Caucus. As well, when women are perceived as a unified group able to influence the results of a vote for or against a certain policy decision, the women MPs are taken seriously and held as a political force to reckon with.

The Product

At the end of the day, what matters most are the outputs and outcomes of women’s participation in governance as advocates, campaigners, candidates or public officials. Were they able to influence the policy agenda? To what extent did they shape policy decisions? What kinds of laws, executive orders or judicial decisions resulted from their efforts? What entitlements, claims and rights did they obtain for women? How did these affect women’s lives, especially the poor, rural, grassroots women?

To assist women political leaders in their efforts to come up with gender-aware policies, they would need support services such as:

- Research and Analysis Using Gender-Disaggregated Data
- Mainstreaming Gender in Public Policy
- Conducting Multi-Stakeholder Consultations
- Developing Gender-Sensitive Monitoring Indicators, and
- Gender Responsive Budgeting

The products or policy decisions should reflect or recognize the differences between women and men in terms of their conditions, needs, access to and control over resources and development benefits as well as their differential impact on women and men.

Conclusions

Governance is difficult business. Engendering governance is harder still. It is not only about increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. It is about women able to identify issues to be included in the policy agenda; deliberate on various policy options; champion and vote for gender-responsive policy solutions; advocate gender responsive budgeting; monitoring implementation; and evaluate policy outcomes.

To be able to do all these a unified, concerted strategy directed at the players, process and product of governance is needed. The strategy should address both the structural and cultural barriers to women's political participation. Engendering governance is not only about structural reform. It is also about deconstructing gender stereotyped roles determined by cultural values, norms and practices. It is about redefining power relationships between women and men, recognizing that their conditions, needs and concerns are not the same and promoting gender balance in representation and participation in decision-making.

CHAPTER II

Strategies and Approaches for Creating an Enabling Environment

GENDER MAINSTREAMING: A KEY STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AT NATIONAL LEVEL

*Ms. Carolyn Hannan (Sweden)**

1. Background

Gender mainstreaming was established as a major strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for gender mainstreaming in all Critical Areas of Concern established at the Fourth World Conference: Poverty, education, health, political decision-making, economy, human rights, violence against women, armed conflict, institutional mechanisms, environment, media and the girl child. The Platform for Action established that gender analysis should be undertaken on the situation and contributions of women as well as men in all areas, before actions are taken, such as development of policies or programmes. The importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy was reinforced in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow-up the implementation of the Platform for Action (June 2000).

Gender mainstreaming was defined by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed conclusions 1997/2 as: "...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." The definition makes clear that gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a means to the goal of gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is one strategy for promoting gender equality. It does not do away with the need for targeted activities for the promotion of gender equality but complements these activities. Gender mainstreaming is, however, an essential strategy as it is the means by which critical policies, strategies, plans, and activities in all other areas of development – political, economic, social, cultural and environmental – can be influenced to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women.

It is important to keep in mind that gender mainstreaming was established because of the failure of previous strategies, in order to address specific constraints. Lessons learned from implementation of special projects and activities for women in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that, while such projects remain essential, by themselves they cannot bring about the required changes to the status of women. Activities focused on women tended to be marginalized and women's access to resources and power remained minimal. Awareness of these constraints led to the integration strategy which attempted to address the issue of marginalization by incorporating "women's perspectives" into policy development and project design and implementation. However women's perspectives were still seen as "add-ons" and usually incorporated at later stages of planning processes when all major decisions had been taken and little real impact could be achieved. Efforts to redress these failings led, in turn, to the gender mainstreaming strategy. Gender mainstreaming was based on the need to move beyond trying to unquestioningly integrate women into the existing development agenda to changing or "transforming" the agenda so that it more adequately responded to the realities and needs of both women and men.

The term 'mainstreaming' came from the objective to bring attention to gender equality into the *mainstream* or core of development activities. A number of important elements in the mainstreaming strategy can be identified. These include the necessity to ensure: attention to gender equality from the *initial stages* of processes so that there is potential to influence goals, strategies and resource allocations and bring about changes in policies, programmes and other activities; *gender analysis* of the roles, responsibilities, contributions as well as potential impact of planned actions on women respective men, as the first essential

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step, before any decisions are taken; a focus on *both women and men* and the relations between them, especially in relation to access to and control over resources and participation in decision-making processes; *explicit attention* to gender perspectives, making them visible and showing the links between gender equality and achievement of the overall goals of all sectors; moving beyond focusing on increasing the numbers of women participating to *bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention* in analyses, policies, planning processes and resource allocations; and identification of the *need for changes* in goals, policies, strategies and actions, as well as institutional changes – changes in structures, procedures and cultures.

2. Achievements since the Fourth World Conference on Women

In July 2004, a review and appraisal of implementation of gender mainstreaming in the United Nations system was carried out by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). A Secretary-General's report providing an overview of implementation was presented to the Coordination Segment in July 2004. The report noted that considerable progress had been made, particularly in the areas of establishing gender equality policies and strategies; establishing specialist resources (units, bureaux, advisers, etc); and providing training for staff. A large gap, however, continues to exist between policy commitments made at the Fourth World Conference and actual implementation. Remaining challenges include the failure to systematically use gender analysis as the basis for policy and programme development; lack of integration of gender perspectives in sector policies and strategies; lack of capacity to identify and address gender perspectives in many critical areas; failure to use the full potential of training; inadequate resources; ineffective utilization of gender specialist resources; and lack of reporting requirements and accountability mechanisms.

The resolution recently adopted by Member States in the Coordination Segment of ECOSOC (July 2004) to ensure enhanced implementation of gender mainstreaming called specifically for the establishment of action plans with time lines by all parts of the United Nations system, which would address the gap between policy and practice with a view to strengthening commitment at the highest levels and establishing mechanisms to ensure systematic monitoring and reporting on progress in implementation.

To date there has not been sufficient systematic assessment of efforts and achievements at national level on gender mainstreaming. Individual ad hoc monitoring exercises and evaluations carried out by Governments, NGOs and international organizations have shown that similar gaps and constraints to those identified in the United Nations system can be found at national level. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005 will provide further information on the status of gender mainstreaming at national level, although unfortunately not all Member States inputs to the review and appraisal include specific information on gender mainstreaming. Shadow reports being prepared by NGOs will also provide information on gender mainstreaming. Further ways and means of assessing progress on gender mainstreaming at national level need to be developed.

Regional Symposium on Gender Mainstreaming in the Asia-Pacific Region

An important step in assessing national level progress was taken in this region with the holding of the Regional Symposium on Gender Mainstreaming in the Asia-Pacific region, in ESCAP from 10-13 December 2001. The objectives of the symposium were to stimulate dialogue and exchange of experience and good practice on gender mainstreaming among different actors in the region, particularly between Governments. The symposium provided an important forum for identifying achievements, as well as constraints and remaining challenges and some of the possible means of overcoming these. It was recognized in the symposium that gender mainstreaming should be an important strategy in all national level bodies, not only the executive, for example also in the judiciary, in the Parliament, in chambers of commerce, etc. It was clear, however, through discussions at the symposium that there were different levels of understanding of gender mainstreaming in the region and thus also of implementation.

In the important area of institutional development some progress was noted at the symposium. A broad range of mechanisms had been adopted by Governments in support of gender mainstreaming. These included: establishing gender units or gender focal points in line ministries; setting up taskforces and/or high-level advisory groups; carrying out training programmes - including for top management; developing action plans; carrying out gender audits, and establishing strategic reporting processes – for example to Parliaments. Efforts had been made to spread the responsibility for achievement of gender equality through

gender mainstreaming within line ministries and other bodies. National machineries, and gender units or focal points within line ministries or other bodies at national level, were increasingly working in a catalytic manner – promoting facilitating gender mainstreaming.

Some key constraints to gender mainstreaming were also identified in the symposium. Gaps between policy commitments and resource allocations negatively affected implementation of gender mainstreaming. Many organizational cultures were not supportive of the promotion of gender equality. There was little awareness of and commitment to gender equality goals and strategies at global or national levels or capacity to implement them. Even where specific policy commitments were in place, adherence to these was not mandatory and there were no sanctions for non-compliance. Neglect of gender perspectives in analyses, policies and programmes was not questioned by senior managers. Gender analysis was not done as a matter of course and unacceptable gaps remained in the availability and use of sex – disaggregated data.

3. Gender mainstreaming and the Millennium Development Goals

In the Millennium Declaration the international community reiterated the commitments made at the global conferences during the 1990s and focused attention on the implementation of those commitments through the establishment of measurable targets. The Millennium Declaration recognized the need to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate truly sustainable development. The specific Millennium Development Goal on gender equality (MDG3) aims to promote gender equality and empower women, with the explicit target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015. The increased focus on the Millennium Declaration as the framework for development provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of gender mainstreaming and promote greater implementation.

While it is important to have a separate goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women, progress towards achieving the goal of gender equality has to be assessed in relation to each of the other Millennium Development Goals. Success in achieving the other goals will not be possible unless gender perspectives are fully incorporated in the implementation of these goals. However, experience to date reveals that more effective implementation of gender mainstreaming is required. In the Millennium Development Goals Country Reports prepared by Governments to date, gender perspectives have not been adequately incorporated. Most of the focus has been on the specific goal on gender equality (MDG3) and little attention has been given to gender perspectives in relation to the other goals. The challenge will be to ensure that gender perspectives are explicitly outlined in discussions on poverty and hunger, education, maternal and child mortality, mortality, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, environmental sustainability and partnerships for development.

Given the recognition in the Millennium Declaration that gender equality is essential for poverty eradication, it is equally important that gender perspectives are fully incorporated into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) prepared by Governments. In many PRSPs gender perspectives are only included in sector areas where the importance of the role of women, or impacts of the sector on women, are well known, such as health and education. The gender perspectives of other important areas for gender equality, such as agriculture, economic development, infrastructure and transport, are neglected. The development of PRSPs is not informed by gender analysis and there is still inadequate consultation with national machineries and women's groups and networks.

4. Remaining key challenges

One remaining major challenge to gender mainstreaming is the fact that gender mainstreaming is often still seen solely as increasing women's participation. Gender mainstreaming involves identifying and addressing the gender perspectives – the linkages between gender equality and different sector areas – in the work of line ministries or other bodies at national level. Gender mainstreaming means bringing attention to the perceptions, knowledge, contributions, priorities and needs of both women and men. Knowledge on the number of women represented in different contexts is not enough. Gender mainstreaming requires significant knowledge on what women and men do; what contributions they make; what resources they have access to and control over; what decisions they participate in; what their potentials are; what constraints they face; and what their needs and priorities are.

A continuing challenge is also the “separateness” or marginalization of work to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. Ten years after the Fourth World Conference many specific processes and mechanisms focused on gender equality – such as policies, strategies, action plans, guidelines, training programmes and monitoring and reporting mechanisms – have been put in place, but often without significant integration into and impact on existing mainstreaming processes and mechanisms. It is not sufficient to establish separate policies, training programmes, methodologies and monitoring and evaluation processes on gender equality. Achievement of gender equality through gender mainstreaming requires further efforts to integrate gender perspectives into existing policies and strategies in different sector areas; into all capacity building programmes; into methodology development initiatives in all areas; and into routine monitoring and reporting mechanisms and procedures.

A further challenge is the fact that gender perspectives are not seen as essential for achieving the goals of all policy areas. Some organizations continue to base their work on the assumption that certain policy areas, for example macro-economics and technical areas, are in principle “gender-neutral”. This makes efforts to incorporate gender perspectives in these areas very difficult. Even in areas where the gender perspectives are well-known, such as in health, education and water sectors, the understanding of their importance to overall sector goals is not always clearly established. Although gender analysis is relatively well developed in these areas, there has been limited success in developing capacity for using this analysis to bring about needed changes at policy and programme levels. The water sector is a particularly illustrative example of this challenge.

In addition, when gender mainstreaming is presented as a very complex process, always requiring significant inputs from gender specialists and beyond the capacity of sector specialists, it is difficult to move implementation forward. Gender mainstreaming cannot be achieved by gender specialists alone. One of major problems in implementing gender mainstreaming is that sector specialists are not adequately involved and their specific knowledge is not being used sufficiently. Innovative ways to secure the full involvement of sector specialists are needed.

In most cases lack of involvement of sector specialists in line ministries or other bodies is not because of a strong opposition to gender mainstreaming but rather due to an uncertainty as to how to implement gender mainstreaming. Often gender specialists have not been able to respond adequately to the lack of awareness, commitment and capacity among sector specialists. This is because, while they may have a sound general knowledge of gender equality issues, they do not have the sector-specific information required to support sector specialists in implementing gender mainstreaming in their sector areas. Greater collaboration and stronger alliances between gender specialists and sector specialists, which build on the knowledge, experience and capacities of both, are therefore essential.

5. Generic steps to improve implementation of gender mainstreaming

Over the past decade a number of steps have been identified as essential for ensuring implementation of gender mainstreaming. These include: firstly, carrying out an assessment of the *linkages* between gender equality and different sectors, that is, to identify the gender implications of working on, for example, environment, poverty elimination, health development, and all other areas of development; secondly, identifying the *opportunities* for introducing gender perspectives in the work tasks undertaken – in research and analysis, policy development, collection, analysis and dissemination of statistics, training events and workshops/conferences, as well as in planning and implementing projects and programmes; thirdly, developing an *approach or methodology* for successfully incorporating gender perspectives into these work tasks, in a manner which influences goals, strategies, resource allocation and outcomes – keeping in mind that different approaches are needed for different types of work, such as research and analysis, statistics, project development; and fourthly, establishing *institutional mechanisms*, such as guidelines, gender specialists, and competence development to support effective implementation.

To increase implementation of gender mainstreaming and contribute more effectively to promotion of gender equality, it is important to ensure that: a *common understanding* of the goal of gender mainstreaming and what the strategy entails in practical terms is in place; *explicit commitment* from management levels is backed up by *concrete accountability mechanisms*, including clear reporting requirements; *responsibility* for gender mainstreaming is allocated across all categories and levels and there is awareness of what this concretely entails; effective *capacity-building* training programmes are available, focused on practical implementation and clearly linked to the work done by different categories and levels of

staff; *well-resourced gender specialists* are able to support the process in a catalytic manner - providing advice, support, resources on request and ensuring systematic monitoring and reporting; and effective and systematic *monitoring and reporting* routines are in place.

6. Building on important innovations

A number of recent innovations in approaches have been developed over the past decade which could be further built upon to support gender mainstreaming in line ministries and other bodies at national level. These include gender mainstreaming in budget processes; making gender analysis mandatory, particularly in planning routines and review processes; and carrying out gender audits. These approaches could make significant improvements to enhancing the enabling environment for promoting gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming in budgets

Over the past decade, there has been an increased awareness of the importance of resource allocations and budgets at different levels for promotion of gender equality. To ensure accountability to policy commitments on gender equality and adequate attention to gender perspectives in policies and programmes, it is necessary to influence planning processes, budget formulation and monitoring and reporting on utilization of resources. In a growing number of countries gender perspectives are therefore being incorporated into national, regional and local budget processes. This work includes analyzing existing budgets from a gender perspective and assessing the correlation of resource allocations with policy commitments on gender equality; training women's groups and networks on analysis of budgets and lobby techniques to influence budget processes at different levels; and working to incorporate gender perspectives in the formulation of new budgets as well as in expenditure reviews.

At the basis of all these initiatives is the objective to make national budget processes more accountable from a gender perspective – to ensure that policy, programme and budget decisions take gender perspectives into account and that policies on gender equality are matched with adequate resource allocations. A related objective is to increase women's participation in economic processes.

In the work on budgets, the extent to which the focus has been on securing funding for targeted activities for women, as opposed to ensuring that all allocations are made on the basis of adequate information on the needs and priorities of all women and men, has not always been clear. Specific funding for gender equality activities is necessary but will not fully ensure gender equality in all areas. Efforts are needed to ensure that policy commitments by governments on gender mainstreaming in health, education, agriculture, and all other sectors, are matched with the required resources. It is important that governments are accountable for the promotion of gender equality in all activities and investments across all sectors.

Mandatory gender analysis

Perhaps one of the most important good practice examples shared at the Regional Symposium on Gender Mainstreaming in the Asia-Pacific Region in 2001 was the mandatory use of gender analysis in planning processes by line ministries in some countries. An essential part of this strategy included support provided to line ministries by national machineries, such as advice and training, to ensure that gender analysis could be undertaken. A number of challenges and constraints were identified in the discussions at the symposium but the experience was overall very positive.

Some experience has also been gained on the importance of ensuring that gender focal points are routinely involved and work collaboratively with line ministries in planning processes as well as in any formal or informal project review processes, to support the systematic utilization of gender analysis in these critical processes.

The experiences of countries – including on challenges and constraints as well as achievements – should be documented and widely disseminated to promote replication of this approach in other countries.

Gender audits

A number of organizations have conducted gender audits which assess what is being done to promote gender equality, for example through gender mainstreaming, as well as how the institutional environment – norms, values, rules and regulations and procedures – supports or hinders promotion of gender equality. The

audits are carried out in a consultative manner and identify gaps and challenges which need to be addressed. Most gender audits directly and/or indirectly link the work on promotion of gender equality with achievement of gender equality within the organizations themselves.

There has been very little documentation of the process involved in gender audits. Dissemination of lessons learned would be important for encouraging other countries to also utilize this approach. Gender audits could be an important instrument for developing an enabling environment for gender equality.

7. Enhancing long-term good practice areas

In a number of long-term good practice areas in the promotion of gender equality, while considerable achievements have been made, a number of challenges and constraints have been identified. There is a need for some rethinking of these critical approaches to ensure further progress in gender mainstreaming. These include training programmes, development of methodologies and tools, establishment of gender units and gender focal points and use of gender analysis.

Training programmes

Training was one of the very first approaches used to promote gender mainstreaming. A lot has been achieved over the past decade. However, there is a need for further thought to be given to how to utilize training effectively. Although there has been a significant focus on training programmes over the past decade, in many organizations it is clear that the impact has not been sufficient. One reason for the less than optimum impact of training has probably been a tendency to treat training as primarily a technical process, requiring only the teaching of analysis techniques. Attitudinal change is required which necessitates a focus on the rationales for the promotion of gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming requires that all professional staff in organizations have awareness, commitment and capacity for promoting gender equality, that is, know *why* promotion of gender equality is an important development goal and *what* they can do to achieve the goal in their own work. Staff in many organizations have received training which addresses the question of why they should be working on gender equality but have not received sufficient support in knowing *how* to go about it. This causes considerable frustration and can lead to opposition.

New approaches are needed which provide incentives and motivation for professional staff to further develop their knowledge, commitment and skills. Experience has shown that gender equality not only has to be *tailored to specific sectors*, but must also be *tailored to the different types of work* done by different groups of professionals. Once professionals are made aware of what the gender perspectives are in relation to the sector they work with, such as health, economics and agriculture, they need to understand how to go about working concretely with these issues when doing research and analysis; collecting and utilizing statistics; and developing, implementing and monitoring and evaluating projects. Each professional needs to be assisted to understand the ways in which gender equality is relevant for the work in their “in-trays”, and how they might go about addressing these issues. Innovative training programmes today focus on the specific tasks that participants are currently working on, in order to make the training as useful as possible. Many programmes also work towards the development of a set of concrete, measureable actions that individual participants can agree to undertake on the completion of the programme, as a means to ensure that the programme will have some immediate effect on the work of participants.

The training efforts made in many organizations have also had less than optimal success because of the limited attention given to follow-up. Managers must be made aware of the commitments made by participants and follow up these commitments on a regular basis. Some organizations have established “help-desks” (which can be electronic) to support participants who have further questions or need additional support after completing their training programmes. Training divisions should develop new means to follow-up training programmes to both assess the effectiveness of the programmes, as well as ensure that professional staff get the additional support they need.

Training divisions in organizations should work together with gender specialists to put in place more diverse, action-oriented and client-friendly training programmes on gender mainstreaming. A range of on-going learning processes need to be initiated, including on-the-job training and interactive debates where topical issues can be discussed, to meet the needs of all professional groups within organizations. Executive

briefings for senior- and middle-level management, rather than traditional training programmes, have been used effectively in some organizations. It is, however, important to know the specific value and contributions of different types of activities. A series of brown bag lunches on diverse topics, for example, can certainly be effective in raising awareness and interest, but will not provide the “hands-on” guidance needed to help professionals know what they need to do differently on a day-to-day basis.

Methodology and tools development

Many organizations, including line ministries, have developed useful methodologies and tools for promoting gender equality. However experience has also shown that many very relevant tools – such as guidelines, manuals, handbooks- on a multitude of sectors are not being used effectively. There are many reasons for the under-utilization of the existing methodologies and tools. In some organizations there is little knowledge among staff that they exist because inadequate attention has been given to dissemination. Methodologies and tools can be used more in PR activities outside the organization than internally as a means to develop capacity. To be effective instruments for change, the tools developed must have a broad distribution within the organization and used effectively in training programmes. “Help-desks” could also be established to support potential users and get feedback to ensure development of more effective methodologies and tools in the future.

A second reason for non-utilization of existing methodologies and tools is that many are overly complex and not user-friendly. Busy bureaucrats need instruments which are clearly developed on the basis of an understanding of what they do, and can provide guidance in a concise manner. Experience has also shown that methodologies and tools which are developed in a collaborative manner, together with those who will use them, have the best chance of being used effectively and making an impact operationally.

Gender Units and Gender Focal points

Although the mainstreaming strategy requires a shift of responsibility for promoting gender equality from specialists to all personnel, especially management levels, this does not imply that gender specialists are no longer required. The need for specialist support can be increased with the implementation of the mainstreaming strategy, particularly during initial periods. Gender specialists should, however, have new roles – catalyzing, advising and supporting the efforts of others.

In many countries gender units and/or gender focal points have been established in line ministries and other bodies to promote and monitor gender mainstreaming. The mandates, access to decision-making processes, support from management levels and resource allocations of these experts and focal points, as well as the support provided by the national machineries, vary considerably across countries and this impacts significantly on the effectiveness of the experts and focal points. It is a challenge to ensure that gender units and gender focal points are not seen as solely responsible for gender mainstreaming. Their role is to support management to implement gender mainstreaming. They have potential to be powerful catalysts for promoting gender mainstreaming if sufficient attention is given to their mandates, location and linkages, resources, and support mechanisms.

While there can be no institutional blueprint for effective establishment and use of gender units and gender focal points in line ministries and other national bodies, there are a number of generic requirements which need to be met. These include: firstly, a clear *job description* outlining the different roles – catalytic roles, advocacy, advisory roles, technical support, dissemination of information, competence development, outreach outside the organization, and monitoring and reporting; secondly, a *skills profile* outlining the qualifications required, and the means by which any necessary additional competence in gender equality and catalytic roles can be acquired on the job; and thirdly, an *organizational profile* clarifying location, reporting structures, access to decision-making processes, linkages with key structures and entities, including management, and access to financial resources.

In some countries networks for gender focal points in line ministries have been established by the national machineries which provide critical support and assist the professional development of the gender focal points, including through training, advisory services, and providing opportunities for networking and exchange to share experiences and good practices on gender mainstreaming. These networks could be further developed to create an enabling environment.

Gender analysis

Over the past 10-15 years different models for gender analysis have been developed which have often been unquestioningly adopted within organizations. The outcome of efforts to introduce gender analysis has been mixed, depending on how practical and “understandable” the analysis methods are, and the manner in which they are linked to the work of organizations. Presentation of analysis models in training programmes in a theoretical manner, with no direct links to the work of participants, can create frustration and resistance.

Developing gender analysis capacity does not so much require teaching a particular analysis model, but fostering capacity of participants to ask the right questions in relation to their work and to know where to go to find the relevant information. It needs to be kept in mind that training programmes do not aim to turn all professionals into gender specialists. Professionals should be supported to know how to analyse their work from a gender perspective, that is, to know what critical questions should be raised, and how to work with these in their daily work.

Presenting gender analysis solely as a separate analysis methodology often leads to the assumption that all gender analysis should be done in the context of separate analyses. Gender mainstreaming rather requires that gender perspectives are incorporated into all existing analyses, such as sector analyses, poverty analyses or analyses on HIV/AIDS, disability, etc. Training programmes should support participants to fully integrate gender perspectives into the existing analyses in their day-to-day work.

8. Facilitating gender mainstreaming within line ministries

The work of a line ministry or other body at national level will be supported by the existence of a national policy and/or strategy on gender equality which includes an explicit commitment to gender mainstreaming. The existence of a strong, pro-active national machinery, interested in collaborating with line ministries and other national bodies, is also critical for successful implementation of gender mainstreaming.

At managerial level within line ministries, a number of critical steps can be identified: firstly, the development of an overall *policy* and *strategy* which clearly outlines the value of including gender perspectives in all sector areas, highlights top management commitment and the expected roles and responsibilities and accountabilities of all staff, and indicates resource requirements; secondly, mandatory incorporation of gender perspectives into all *planning and budget processes*; thirdly, requirement of the development of concrete action plans with time frames in all organizational units, which include clear indications of how the plans would be monitored and reported on; and fourthly, mandated sex-disaggregation of all *data* and identification of data collection needs to adequately carry out gender analyses in all areas of work in the sector.

At institutional level, the following support to gender mainstreaming would be required to create an enabling environment: firstly, development and delivery of hands-on *training programmes* for all categories and levels of staff, including executive briefings for senior levels; secondly, development of *guidance tools and materials* – briefing notes, fact sheets, guides and manuals; thirdly, development of *accountability mechanisms* to hold staff responsible – through individual contracts, reporting procedures and monitoring and evaluation procedures; fourthly, systematic *monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements*, including documentation and dissemination of good practice examples.

Individual sector specialists in line ministries would need to consider a number of issues in relation to the specific sectors they are working on:

- What does gender equality concretely mean in the specific sector?
- What has already been done to promote gender equality and what has been achieved? How can this be built on?
- What gaps remain and how can they be addressed?
- What are the implications for data collection and utilization? Is sufficient information/data available? Where does available information need to be further disaggregated? What new questions have to be addressed?

- How would existing activities – data collection, analysis, policies, strategies, action plans, and activities – have to change?
- What new actions would need to be undertaken?

9. The role of national machineries in promoting and supporting gender mainstreaming

A key question in relation to developing strategies and approaches for creating an enabling environment for promoting gender equality is the role of national machineries. National machineries have a critical catalytic role to play in promoting, supporting and monitoring gender mainstreaming in line ministries and other bodies at national level.

Unfortunately, experience has shown that, for different reasons, many national machineries are not directly involved with gender mainstreaming and do not have close working relationships with line ministries and other bodies. The national machineries are fully engaged in implementing technical projects and carrying out research, advocacy and information dissemination and other activities. It is critical that national machineries establish clear goals on their role in relation to gender mainstreaming, as well as indicators on the achievement of these goals. One key role has already been discussed – the support provided to gender units and gender focal points in line ministries, including through networks.

The potential role of national machineries needs further discussion. There is a need for further clarity on how national machineries could increase the priority given to gender mainstreaming, what “catalytic” roles for national machineries would entail, and what the resource and capacity requirements are for more active roles of national machineries in the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

10. Conclusions

Like any other strategy, gender mainstreaming can only be as good as the efforts made to implement it. There is clearly a need to invest greater resources to ensure enhanced understanding of the strategy and the ways in which it should be implemented. A lot of what is today called gender mainstreaming – and is criticized for failing to achieve the intended goals – is in reality not gender mainstreaming. It is important to be clear about what gender mainstreaming is and what its implementation involves. It is also critical to be as practical and concrete as possible in promoting, supporting and monitoring its implementation.

The review and appraisal of implementation of the Platform for Action at this high-level regional intergovernmental meeting, and this panel and its parallel session in particular, provides an important occasion to renew commitment to gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy for gender equality and to build on achievements made and lessons learned by highlighting the main gaps and challenges and clarifying further actions required for its full implementation.

The importance of exchange of experiences, achievements and good practices, as well as constraints and challenges, cannot be over-emphasized. The parallel session provides an opportunity to discuss further good experiences with key well-tried approaches, such as training programmes and use of gender specialists, and to address some of the constraints identified in relation to these approaches. In addition, discussion of concrete experiences with some of the more recent innovations, such as gender audits, mandatory gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in budgets, would be very useful. Further consideration of the role of national machineries in relation to promoting and supporting these approaches in line ministries and other national level bodies would also be critical.

WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS: A FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION*

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Introduction

The Beijing World Conference (1995) was held in an environment where a new ideology of universal indivisible and interdependent human rights had just been formulated in the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights (1993).

It was Asia's critique of the exclusive focus by Western countries on civil and political rights as the essence of human rights in the Bangkok Declaration, that helped to develop the ideology of the indivisibility and interdependence of civil and political rights and socio economic rights. The Vienna Declaration also came up with the idea that if all these rights were important, they were valid universally.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) CEDAW had enshrined this same ideology on the universality and indivisibility of human rights in the context of women's human rights several decades before Vienna. The link between women's rights and human rights in its new interpretation in Vienna was recognised in the Beijing Platform of Action. However neither CEDAW nor human rights became the overarching framework for the document. Women's human rights was considered as one of the "Critical area of Concern". Governments and women's groups in the Asia Pacific region have thus been encouraged to develop National Plans of Action for achieving gender equality for women on the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action rather than human rights commitments and CEDAW. There is an impression that we can achieve the overarching objective of equality for women in our region by focusing exclusively on the Beijing Platform for Action. Human rights continue to be considered an aggressive individualist agenda that undermines the communitarian values in Asian societies, and has marginal relevance in achieving gender equality and improving women's status.

Much has happened since the Beijing World Conference in 1995. We have experienced economic transformation, and witnessed the growth of internal and cross border armed conflict on a larger scale than ever before. Many of these conflicts are based on divisive ideologies of race and religion. All these developments have surfaced competing concerns that challenge the ideology of the universality and indivisibility of human rights. However there has also been a growing international consensus that it is the ideology of human rights that can help to address the challenges posed.

The UN reforms initiated by Secretary General Kofi Annan in 1999 give centrality to human rights, declaring the defence of human rights to be "at the very heart of every aspect of our work and every article of our (U.N.) Charter" While the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of human rights have become the source of these universal and indivisible human rights standards and norms, increasing numbers of countries have voluntarily agreed to accept them and incorporate them as the norms of good governance in their countries. To date the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the CEDAW Convention have reached almost universal ratification. All countries except USA and Somalia have ratified CRC. CEDAW has been ratified by 177 countries – 90% of the members of the U.N. This includes practically all countries in the Asia Pacific region.

State Party Commitments, Human Rights Treaties, and CEDAW

The ratification of a treaty imposes obligations on that country under international law. Article 27 of the Vienna Convention on Treaties clarifies the idea that "pacta sunt servanda" – treaties bind all States parties and their governments, and must be implemented in good faith. Domestic law and practice is not a

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basis for failing to implement treaty obligations. Scrutiny of country performance and evaluation of progress becomes a legitimate and lawful exercise. No longer can it be perceived as an invasion of State sovereignty. The human rights project has to be internalized as a nationally relevant and valid initiative. This is why a country that has ratified CEDAW is regularly required to report progress on implementing the treaty to the Committee of experts elected under the treaty to serve as the monitoring treaty body. The Committee examines the reports of States Parties to the treaty, and pronounces “concluding observations” on the report.

The indivisibility of human rights necessarily means that the community of nations cannot delink development from human rights. Even as human rights can no longer be associated only with civil and political rights, socio economic rights cannot be considered more important. The full range of human rights must inextricably be linked in national development efforts to achieve the standards of international law and good governance. The latter part of the century showed us very dramatically that sustainable development requires economic growth combined with equity and accountable governance, to improve the quality of life of people. We learned that countries that had high economic growth could not sustain these achievements when this change had not impacted on the lives of the mass of the population. Similarly countries that had achieved high social indicators, especially for marginalised sectors of the population, such as women and children, could not sustain them when there was little or no economic growth. The focus on human rights provides a framework for ensuring balanced development that combines economic growth and peoples well being. This is why the latest UN reforms focus on human rights as central to development.

As we move into the next decade and celebrate Beijing + 10 we should reflect on whether we as governments and people have understood the significance of human rights, and worked in good faith towards fulfilling these commitments. Have we together tried to realize the promise of these norms and standards for human well being?

The treaty bodies monitoring country performance by scrutinizing reports submitted to them, have constantly advised governments on the importance of linking all national initiatives with their treaty obligations. The guidelines for country reports, and the concluding observations of the CEDAW Committee on country reports, call upon governments to integrate the Beijing Platform for Action with commitments made under international law to implement the treaty. A standard paragraph in the concluding observations emphasizes the importance of distributing the Committee’s concluding observations as well as the Beijing Platform for Action within the country. Specific comments in the concluding observations in the recent reports on Mongolia, Nepal, China, Thailand and Sri Lanka refer with approval to efforts to develop national initiatives that link CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. The Committee has referred to the absence of or need for more information on integrating the Beijing Platform for Action in implementing CEDAW commitments in various sectors, in its concluding observations on the last reports of India and Indonesia. The Committee emphasized in its concluding observations on China, that “the Convention constitutes the legal basis and framework of the Beijing Platform for Action.”

One of the challenges in the meeting on Beijing + 10 is to understand and internalize women’s human rights perspectives into the gender and development project in the Asia Pacific region. Governments that have ratified CEDAW have an obligation under international law to sustain that commitment even when other development agendas are placed before them. The UN Millenium Development Goals (MDG’s) that are empahsised today in development co-operation for instance make women’s issues a central concern in evaluating progress. Goal 3 is a commitment to “promote gender equality and empower women”. Other distinct goals on reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health, are specifically relevant to women, while goals on poverty eradication, combating HIV and other diseases, environmental sustainability, and partnerships in development, link to both the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW. However the achievement of universal primary education is too limiting, and may undermine the Beijing and CEDAW Commitment to maximize allocation of resources for secondary education, tertiary education and IT. Country experiences in Asia and the Pacific demonstrate that it is investment in these sectors rather than primary education that has bridged gender disparities in education, and provided women and children with access to better education and health.

Governments thus have important responsibilities as duty bearers under international human rights norms., They must “respect and promote” human rights. This means that they and their agencies must not violate the commitments they have undertaken through their own decisions as Sovereign States, to ratify treaties. They also have an obligation to “protect” their peoples from violation of human rights perpetrated

by third parties. Their inaction and failure in this regard is a violation of their obligation of due diligence, under international law, and they are as responsible as if they have infringed these rights. The focus on the State has often been criticized as relieving private non-State actors of liability for infringement, when they play a very important role in all spheres of life in the community. However the CEDAW Convention itself has provisions that make both State and Non State actors responsible for implementing its standards. Under Article 2 of the Convention a State Party must take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women “by any person or organization or enterprise”. CEDAW therefore imposes obligations on Non State actors, and the State has a duty to ensure that these obligations are fulfilled. Non-State actors cannot claim immunity, and are accountable to conform with the international treaty standards. The accountability of Non-State actors is also reiterated in international humanitarian law that applies in situations of armed conflict.

Human rights norms therefore do not permit civil society or NGOs or the private sector to take over the responsibility for governance. Nor can we use the term “failed State” to relieve governments of their responsibility for governance. The term “failed State” is often a misnomer, since a State that fails to deliver services and governs in critical areas also has access to international fora and resources and coercive State power. The human rights project neither over empowers the State nor relieves it of responsibility. It sets the parameters for good governance with accountability to the people who are the holders of human rights.

Many of our countries have Constitutions and laws that guarantee equality and other human rights for women. However these Constitutional provisions and laws are often considered a statement of ideals. The lack of an enforcement procedure to implement these rights encourages a certain apathy in regard to enforcement. Neither women, law enforcement agencies or administrators recognize that effective implementation is an intrinsic aspect of recognizing equality as a value in the Constitution and legislation. The CEDAW treaty obligations are very important in this context. Article 2 of CEDAW calls upon States to “embody the principle of equality of men and women in their national constitutions and legislation and to ensure the practical realization of this principle.” “Discrimination” must be clearly defined by law, so as to cover de jure and de facto inequality, and every effort made to eliminate discrimination in any form. This means that even laws that provide formal equality must be examined for their impact and result. Such laws must be reassessed if they lead to discrimination. The Convention requires commitment to eliminating both laws and practices that discriminate against women.

The Constitutional jurisprudence that has emerged from the Superior Courts in South Asian countries has demonstrated how an enforcement mechanism can help women as holders of rights to make the State and its agencies accountable for implementing these guarantees. Women have been able to bring actions for violation of their constitutional rights to equality in employment, bodily security and freedom from violence. They have also been able to claim violations on behalf of their next of kin such as spouses and children in cases of torture of a family member. Constitutional guarantees have also helped to internalize international treaty standards including CEDAW. A court can expand the meaning of a right guaranteed in a Constitution by reference to the treaty standard, or a General Recommendation pronounced by a treaty body like the CEDAW Committee that monitors performance of countries (States Parties) under the treaty. While achievements in areas such as health and education have been impressive in some countries, performance in the region has been uneven. There are also many gaps, including in the area of violence against women. The gaps in enforcement must be recognized if inequality is to be addressed. An effective mechanism of enforcement, either through Courts or an effective Women’s Commission is an inherent dimension of a CEDAW based women’s rights approach to eliminating discrimination. It can contribute to strengthening development that is gender sensitive at all levels.

The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, (2000) has not been ratified by many countries in Asia, and the Pacific. It provides for a procedure that allows individual women to make a complaint at the international level. Her consent is usually required, but the complaint can be made on her behalf by a women’s group or NGO. There is also an inquiry procedure in respect of systemic and widespread infringements, but a State Party ratifying this Protocol can opt out of the Inquiry procedure. The CEDAW Committee in its examination of country reports of progress, requests that this Optional Protocol is ratified. The ratification of the Optional Protocol is seen as clearly indicative of good faith in fulfilling the CEDAW commitments, and willingness to be transparent and accountable at the national and international level to women within the country. The ratifications of the Optional Protocol can be a catalyst for developing and strengthening procedures, and institutions for enforcement of equality rights at the national level.

State Parties have a constant challenge in implementing treaty obligations where there are conflicting pressures to fulfill different needs and rights. The right to gender equality and bodily security may come in conflict with the right to freedom of religion and enjoyment of culture. Situations of armed conflict and peace negotiations may make it more difficult to realize women's socio economic rights such as health and education, or the right to bodily security. The economic transformation project may mean that there are pressures for deregulation and an open policy in economic activities of the private sector. This can result in poor labour and employment practices in regard to women.

The human rights project has a clear stand in all these circumstances, and this approach is reflected in the concluding observations pronounced by the CEDAW Committee when it has examined reports of countries from Asia and the Pacific and other parts of the world. The principle of non-derogability means that human rights in regard to torture or freedom of religion and conscience cannot be interfered with in any circumstances. On the other hand manifestation of religion and culture, and equality can be limited in certain defined circumstances. Constitutional Courts including new Constitutions in some countries such as South Africa have developed a concept of "purposive interpretation" of rights. This means that it is necessary for the State to ensure that the limitation introduced is reasonable to achieve the well being of the whole society, and does not become so broad in scope as to eliminate or completely dilute the human rights that are guaranteed by law and the Constitution.

It is in this spirit of "purposive interpretation" that the CEDAW Committee has interpreted Articles on customs and traditions, (Art. 5) and the Family (Art 16) so as to accommodate the norms of gender equality and bodily security. Countries such as India, Singapore, Nepal, Fiji and Sri Lanka with plural personal laws have been requested to develop civil codes or laws that can be adopted by choice by all communities in the country. Countries with an Islamic tradition like Maldives have been requested by the Committee to achieve equality by sharing comparative reformist jurisprudence from other Islamic countries. This is a recognition that religion and custom cannot be an excuse for institutionalizing or perpetuating gender inequality and discrimination, when changes can be introduced through a study and understanding of the religious or cultural tradition.

Gender based violence, is therefore perceived as an infringement of human rights whether it occurs in the family or the community. Domestic violence, rape or sexual harassment cannot be legitimized by reference to religion custom or tradition. Gender equality is still not considered a non derogable core human rights norm like torture or race discrimination. However the recognition of gender based violence as an infringement of human rights has expanded the scope of State and Non-State actor liability for violations. A rights approach provides a basis for law reform and advocacy to eliminate practices that legitimize violence, on the premise that there is an infringement of women's right to bodily security, access to health and safe employment. Such infringements can then be explained as not just an issue of family privacy or community tradition, but a public concern with community health and economic productivity.

Though the CEDAW Convention does not have specific articles covering armed conflict, the Committees has used the general articles on human rights (Art 1 to 3) to consider the situation of women in armed conflict. The Committee has emphasized the importance of recognizing their right of access to education and health, and protection from violence and torture. It has reiterated that the State has responsibility to prosecute violations, including those by the armed forces, so that there is no impunity or immunity on the ground of an armed conflict.. Governments are considered accountable for protecting women from violence in police custody. Resolution 1325 of the Security Council, reinforces this approach, and encourages the CEDAW Committee to give more importance to the issue of women and violence in armed conflict, and the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace negotiations, rehabilitation, transitional justice.

The CEDAW Committee has consistently considered the State accountable for the actions of Non-State Actors. They have expressed concern that the economic transformation project in Asian countries has sometimes disempowered and marginalized women, undermining their health and education status and access to employment. It has commented on the accountability of the State for inaction in law enforcement when violence against women has been perpetrated within the family or by non-State actors. The Committee has not, as yet, adopted the approach taken by the Committee monitoring the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. That Committee in its concluding comments on the reports of countries has emphasized that treaty obligation should be cited by developing countries to negotiate with International Financial Institutions. This provides an opportunity to give priority to concluding observations

in loan negotiations, grant funding and development assistance. The concept Non-State actor liability is especially relevant in an environment of globalisation with the focus on the private sector in economic transformation.

The CEDAW Committee has addressed the important issue of integrating a gender equality perspective in poverty alleviation programmes and land distribution by the State, in considering progress on commitments to rural women under Art 14. Access to land through equal inheritance and matrimonial property distribution has been considered as a dimension of equality in the family under Art 16. The rights recognised under these articles should be the basis for reviewing laws and policies on inheritance and land use, in countries of the region. Too often policies on land tenure or land use rights interface with social realities and customs on marriage and women's patrilocal residence and their unequal status in decision making in the family. Unless these realities are addressed in law and policy formulation women may not obtain access to land, or compensation that is paid when development policies result in displacement of low income populations. A women's rights perspective encourages governments to ensure that women's access to land is not denied or prejudiced. Land laws and policies of the State can indeed provide women with the user rights and security of tenure that they are denied because of customary practices in agriculture or inheritance laws. A rights based approach can inform laws and policies on land allocation, demolition of housing, shelter resettlement and compensation, in the new environment of economic transformation.

The human rights agenda was at one time associated exclusively with lawyers and law enforcement. A concept of rights and protection against violations, clearly involves law reform, justiciability and law enforcement through an impartial agency such as Courts, Human Rights Commissions or Ombudspersons. The concept of the States responsibility to "respect and fulfill rights" means that law reform must also be supported by social policies, allocation of resources, and the creation of appropriate institutions and administrative structures. A human rights based approach thus encourages holistic development approaches that combine law reform, with law enforcement, resource allocation, and capacity building. Interdisciplinary approaches are therefore critical to create an enabling environment to realize human rights. This is particularly relevant for the human right to equality and has special significance for gender issues.

Addressing inequalities through gender analysis and gender disaggregated data so as to realize and eliminate disparities is a vital aspect of a human rights based approach. A rights based approach can therefore help to clarify the strategies for gender mainstreaming, so as to achieve the over all objective of equality and justice for women. Too often "gender mainstreaming" has led to gender neutral approaches in areas such as employment health and education or law enforcement. Law reforms programmes and policies fail to analyse the different impact on men and women, due to institutionalized discrimination that women suffer in their families and communities.

A human rights approach helps to develop national plans of action that go beyond formal gender equality and address de facto inequality. Each sector that is covered by a human right as articulated in CEDAW can therefore become the basis for gender analysis, law reforms and adequately budgeted policy initiatives. Institution and capacity building, an often neglected area must also be considered an intrinsic dimensions of such initiatives.

Consequently a rights based approach will support affirmative action policies and positive interventions introduced temporarily to benefit women. The CEDAW Committee's most recent General Recommendations No. 25 addresses and provides guidelines on the aspect of affirmative action which is referred to in Article 4 of the CEDAW Convention. It can help to clear misunderstandings on what is considered a temporary affirmative action measure that can be phased out once parity has been achieved. This new General Recommendation can fertilise national action plans to achieve parity in areas such as women's education, political participation and decision making in the high levels of administrative office.

Peoples Participations and Human Rights

Since human rights create claims, the State's responsibility is balanced by the need to treat people as rights holders and participants in development, rather than passive beneficiaries of government generosity. This dimension was neglected for a long time in international relations. It is the human rights project more than any other that has legitimized the idea of peoples participation for sustainable development.

This concept has special relevance for women's issues in Asia and the Pacific. Women have often been considered as duty bearers without rights who must be protected, and their interests have not been a priority in development. A rights based approach that focuses on women as rights holders, recognises their strength, and the reality of their social and economic contribution whether in the family or the community. The rights approach encourages them to be perceived as citizens who must participate in national development, and also enjoy the fruits of development.

Since rights awareness and monitoring are intrinsic to the human rights project, legal literacy, and women's access to information and capacity to monitor development have to be an integral dimension of development initiatives that link to treaty obligations. This insight can and should inform all policy planning and programmes on poverty reduction.

The right of access to information is also critically important for a new class of women entrepreneurs in countries of the region. They require this access if they are to organize their business and family life in a supportive environment. Women who may contribute to a family business are often prejudiced in the event of divorce because of unfair property distribution, and incapacity to access information on family assets and investments. Creating rights awareness in this category can also help to make them gender sensitive employers who may contribute to creating good employment practices in industry and private business.

The legitimization of monitoring country performance because of treaty obligations has given women and civil society a status that they did not have before at the international level. Today women's NGOs and civil society groups have status to appear before the treaty bodies when governments present their reports. They are encouraged to produce "Shadow Reports" that address vital issues of concern to women, that may not be considered in the State report. They have an opportunity to dialogue with the CEDAW Committee when a pre-sessional working group formulates questions for a government after considering a periodic report submitted by the State Party. Women's groups also have opportunities to present their views when the Committee formulates General Recommendations. Indeed States Parties that interact with women's NGOs and civil society groups in preparing their reports are commended for this initiative. The Committee also emphasizes the obligation of the State Party to distribute concluding observations widely within the country. They are also made accessible on the website of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women.

It has therefore become legitimate for women's groups to use concluding observations on a country report to lobby for accountability on the part of governments. Concluding observations of the Committee provide insights into areas in which there can be collaboration with government in achieving progress. There is a balance between independent scrutiny and participation, so that the women's human rights agenda can no longer be seen as an adversarial attack on government. National sovereignty is considered to have been voluntarily surrendered in good faith to achieve the women's human rights agenda, Governments and people are both accountable for progress in implementing these rights.

Bilateral Agencies

This profound development in international relations has also created a special role for bilateral agencies and international financial institutions. Human rights in the Asia Pacific context cannot be perceived as one that is imposing conditionally to realize civil and political rights as a single economic model. On the other hand the concept of "progressive realization" of socio economic rights does not mean that satisfaction of people's basic needs can be postponed indefinitely until maximum economic growth is achieved. Human rights emphasizes the importance of development cooperation to realize rights. The CRC has specific provisions in this regard, but the CEDAW Committee has developed concluding observation and procedures on the basis that this co-operation is a critical dimension of realizing women's rights. It is important that International and Regional Financial Institutions also recognize these development and approach development from this rights perspective.

Conclusion

The Beijing Platform for Action held promise that the human rights of women would be a critical area of concern. In the intervening decade, many countries in this region have ratified CEDAW. The CEDAW Committee has constantly referred to the need to integrate the Platform for Action with CEDAW,

so that the latter becomes the overarching framework. Yet many countries have adopted strategies such as developing National Plans of Action and Gender mainstreaming without a right based approach. This has become a disadvantage in achieving real progress on the goal of gender equality. Recognising women's rights as human rights is critical for sustainable development that combines equity with growth, accountable governance, and gender justice. As Michael Dodson an Australian Human Rights Commissioner has said "Policies and programmes which rest primarily on a perception of need ...subtly reinforces the powerlessness of the recipients. ...The recognition of entitlement is in itself an act of empowerment" The human rights project calls on governments to consider peoples and women's empowerment a critical aspect of development rather than a threat. The rhetoric on women's empowerment in the last decade did not link enough with human rights of women. This is a gap that must be addressed to carry forward the agenda on gender justices in our region.

PARTNERSHIPS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

*Dr. Patricia Licuanan (Philippines)**

This Paper addresses partnerships and regional cooperation as approaches for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for the empowerment of women or more specifically for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Allow me to introduce this discussion by sharing one of my favorite experiences in my many years of involvement in the preparations for the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women. This had to do with the selection of the title and theme of the Conference.

In 1991 in Vienna, the Commission on the Status of Women had to decide on the title and theme of the FWCW. At the time I was Vice-Chairperson of the Commission and was assigned the task of chairing the consultations on this issue. One of the early favorites for title and theme was “Half the World—Half the Power”. It was short, strong and had a nice ring to it. After some discussion however, more cautious voices (mainly from Asia and Pacific) prevailed, as it was pointed out that the proposal sounded a bit too threatening to men and may undermine the support that we would need from them.

The second popular suggestion was “Partnership for Equality, Development and Peace.” This was definitely much friendlier and would have been chosen were it not for a practical issue. The Chinese delegate pointed out that there would be a serious translation problem as there was no character in Chinese that stood for partnership between men and women outside of marriage. Finally, the unanimous choice was “The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace” to emphasize the action needed to achieve the goals of the U.N. Decade for Women (1976-1985).

Why do I find this experience on the title and theme of the Beijing Conference significant? I believe it illustrates the serious ambivalence toward empowerment of women even by women themselves as well as the complexity of the concept of partnership, an important pre-requisite for the empowerment of women. Today, almost fifteen years later and ten years after Beijing, I hope we are less conflicted about and thus more committed to the empowerment of women and that we have a better understanding and appreciation of the meaning and possibilities of partnerships. After all power and partnerships are necessary ingredients for action.

Outline of Paper

This paper will follow this outline:

1. Commitment to partnership
2. Understanding partnerships
3. Partnership experiences
4. Beijing and beyond: partnerships in the Beijing process
5. Networking and the role of information and communication technology (ICT)
6. Regional cooperation
7. Problems, perils and pitfalls of partnerships
8. Challenges of partnerships

Commitment to Partnership

The Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action emphasize the necessity of a “harmonious partnership” and a “transformed partnership based on equality” between men and women. Aside from partnership between women and men, another major emphasis is the partnership between and among “all actors of civil society, particularly women’s groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations” along with the commitment of “governments, international organizations and institutions at all levels”.

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To emphasize these partnerships, the strategic objectives and actions for each of the twelve critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action identified actions to be taken 1. by governments; 2. by multilateral financial and development institutions, regional development institutions and bilateral development cooperation organizations; 3. by national and international non-governmental organizations and women's groups; 4. by academic and research institutions; and 5. by the private sector.

The Jakarta Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific which came out of our regional preparatory meeting for the Beijing Conference "aimed at achieving the full realization of the advancement of women as equal partners with men, in the family and society, based on a harmonious and mutually beneficial partnership between men and women". The section on implementation stressed that "coordinated and complementary action is required from a number of different parties for the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific to contribute effectively to the advancement of women in the region; these include governments, intergovernmental organizations, donor countries and agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the general public."

Clearly there is an explicit commitment, at the global as well as regional level, to partnership for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is also obvious that partnership in this context refers to: 1. partnership between women and men in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment; and 2. partnership between and among a broad range of actors who have to cooperate and work together if the goals of equality, development and peace are to be achieved. Because there is a separate paper in this panel on working with men, this paper will focus on the second type of partnership.

Understanding Partnerships

Over the years, to further the cause of empowerment of women, individuals formed groups, groups formed larger groups or groups of groups. Various terms have been used to refer to these acts of coming together or their products.

Definitions

A review of language used for these groups as well as related concepts, invariably reveal terms such as "coalition", "collaboration", "cooperation", "networks", and "partnership". "Forum" and "watch (groups)" are also popular.

The following loose definitions are offered.

1. *Collaboration* seems to be the most general term and often refers to the act of working together towards the same end, rather than to the group itself.
2. *Partnership* is often used in the context of an intersectoral grouping, whether on the national or international level. Thus, we hear of partnerships between governments and civil society, partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, or GO-NGO partnerships, and partnerships between the government and the private or business sector.
3. *Network* is frequently used to refer to laterally organized groups, or groups belonging either to the same sector or working on the same area/s of concern. Networks may be organized both on the national and international levels. Nationally based groups pursuing specific areas of concern bond with similar groups from other countries, and may refer to the larger groups as networks. Thus we have health networks, gender and trade networks, anti-trafficking networks, and networks of environmentalists. There are also women and gender networks, which deal with more comprehensive issues.
4. *Cooperation* appears to be applied more often to international, usually sub-regional or regional, groupings. When national governments in a region act together, we say that there is regional cooperation.
5. *Coalition* is probably the least frequently used term. In its political context, it connotes joining together of forces for a singular urgent purpose, a temporary alliance or partnering of groups in order to achieve a common purpose or to engage in a common activity. A coalition formed in a conflict situation could affect the balance of power and change the course of the conflict.

For the purpose of this paper we will use partnership to refer to all the above concepts that is, the wide range of coming together of a number of actors to achieve common goals and where each of the partners contributes and gains from this association.

Reasons for Partnering

There are varied reasons for coming together or partnering.

1. *A common goal.* This is the basic reason for forming partnerships. An entity may realize or identify its goals in several ways. Goals could be prescribed in national statutes, such as the constitution, and this prompts the government to form partnerships with other sectors. More often however, goals are dictated by need. In the extreme, needs are realized during crisis situations, for example, when there is a high incidence of trafficked women for employment purposes, or when some countries register high maternal mortality rates relative to international standards.
2. *Greater effectiveness.* Partnerships are also formed because entities realize that programs or reforms could be more effective when undertaken with other groups. Coming from numerous sectors with just as many ways of approaching an issue, partners could consider their goals in a more holistic and comprehensive manner. In this way, partners benefit from each other's expertise and resources. They are also able to give their cause a "louder voice". Synergy – the whole is more than the sum of its parts – is frequently used to explain this reason for partnering.

For example, groups protesting the inappropriate portrayal of women in media would do well to partner with media practitioners or academic groups who could offer technical expertise and with the government, which has the mandate to police improper actions of media.

3. *Greater efficiency.* A basic reality in implementing change is that there will frequently be a need for material and human resources. Often, activities, issues and concerns surrounding women's empowerment transcend sectoral and geographical borders. For this reason, partnerships are necessary in order for available resources to be maximized, and for targeted benefits to be derived at the least possible cost, taking advantage of economies of scale.

For example, monitoring of compliance with anti-trafficking laws is usually an expensive yet urgent activity, necessitating specially trained personnel. By pooling resources, this obstacle could be overcome by countries sharing a common border or by in-country groups sharing this concern.

4. *To fulfill a mandate.* Groups may be mandated to work with other entities. The representation of women NGOs in a government-convened inter-agency group to implement a national plan for women illustrates this reason for partnership. In the name of a common cause, partners could view this as a challenge to "make it work", however obligatory the conception of the partnership may initially be.
5. *The opportunity presented itself.* If forming partnerships because of a common need is a demand-driven situation, this is a supply-led situation. Sometimes, it takes a third party to effect the coming together of prospective partners or to prod existing partners to embark on another activity. Oftentimes, this third party is an entity engaged in macro planning or development work with accompanying resources. For example, the availability of technical assistance from international development agencies on the design of indicators and indices on gender equality and women's empowerment could facilitate the establishment or fine-tuning among groups of a common monitoring and evaluation system, a crucial element in the sustainability of partnerships.

Partnership Experiences

Partnering Sectors

Sectors forming partnerships bring in their functional specializations into the relationship. The nature of one's work and evolution as an individual entity determines a partnering sector's functional specialization. Broadly, these functional specializations could be planning, research, information dissemination, advocacy, organizational work and implementation, capability building, support and referral, monitoring and evaluation, and resource generation.

Invariably, the following sectors form partnerships for women's empowerment. Their likely functional specializations are likewise identified.

1. *Government.* Whether on the local or national level, governments pursue gender equality and women's empowerment in pursuit of national principles, statutes, and international agreements. Since they have clear mandates (usually supported by resource-related powers) and have the appropriate institutional mechanisms to pursue these activities, governments are usually the convening entities in a partnership. For the same reason, they could also tackle most of the functions listed above, particularly monitoring and evaluation and information dissemination.
2. *Civil society.* Civil society refers to a rather diverse group identified as such because its members work outside the government. The business sectors, community organizations, and NGOs form part of civil society. The term has evolved to be synonymous with NGOs. Civil society has also been understood to be that sector outside the state (government) and the market (business). The diversity of civil society renders it capable of all the above-mentioned functional specializations.
3. *Non-government organizations.* By their label, NGOs are entities created sans government action. The operations of NGOs are likewise distinct and separate from those of government. Since many NGOs were organized to do community-based work, they have developed the capability for organizational work and project implementation. Many NGOs also trace their origins to work for the marginalized sectors; as such, they are known to be competent in advocacy, support and referral, and compliance monitoring. NGOs can also handle capability building efforts.
4. *Private sector.* The private sector is largely taken to mean the business sector. In general, the private sector is sought as a partner for the resources it can contribute to an undertaking. These resources are usually financial and material, although many enterprises do contribute technical expertise to an intersectoral partnership.
5. *Academe.* The academe is naturally associated with partnerships in research, education, training and other forms of capability building. It can also contribute to the formulating and field-testing of monitoring and evaluation systems. The extension arms of many academic institutions have branched out to support and referral activities for marginalized groups.
6. *The United Nations.* A partnership by itself, the UN has initiated and supports major reforms in gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming through a range of sustained programs running along all the functional areas of work enumerated above.

GO-NGO Partnerships: Some Country Examples

Some of the early country reports submitted for the Beijing +10 review include examples of GO-NGO partnership experiences.

1. *Iran.* The Center of Participation of Women, the Iranian government's focal point for women, transferred some public sector duties and responsibilities to women NGOs, which receive government support as they implement specific programs. The year 2000 was a turning point in the Center's cooperation with women NGOs. Non-refundable financial aid grants have been given to 75 women NGOs for equipment and capacity building purposes.
2. *Malaysia.* Networking between government and NGOs has been strengthened. Measures have been undertaken to assist NGOs in carrying out their activities for the benefit of women through training programs. Funds have been allocated to NGOs to implement the Plan of Action for Women.

The Ministry of Women and Family Development has forged partnerships with NGOs to implement programs for women. Special allocations have been provided to NGOs who are active in gender advancement programs and gender training.

3. *Nepal*. Although the coordination of Women in Development/GAD NGOs with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare continued during the Beijing +5 period, consultations with these NGOs in 2003 revealed greater need for the collaborative partnership in policy formulation and implementation with the Ministry needing to develop the culture of responsibility and sharing.
4. *People's Republic of China*. The government of China has paid particular attention to close cooperation with NGOs. Five NGOs have developed their own programs to implement the National Programme for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010), and have conducted effective cooperation with the government and concerned departments in the labor protection of women workers, encouraging women's participation in politics, alleviating poverty among rural women, helping urban workers with employment, eliminating illiteracy among women, increasing women's awareness of health care, and safeguarding women's personal rights.

In the area of violence against women, government departments and NGOs cooperate with each other to take various means and measures to rescue and assist women victims.

5. *Philippines*. The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) is supported by partner organizations and networks of gender specialists and women's groups. These include the Gender and Development (GAD) Resource Centers (GRC) and Gender Resource Network (GRN). The GRCs are based in academic institutions and composed of faculty members, members of government and NGOs trained to provide assistance in the conduct of gender sensitivity training, gender-responsive planning and GAD planning and budgeting.

NCRFW works in partnership with statistical agencies in the development and continuous enhancement of indicators and gender statistics, which are key elements in the government's GAD monitoring and evaluation system.

Four hundred local councils of women, composed of women's organizations were set up to mainstream GAD in city and provincial governments. They liaise with national agencies and NGOs to monitor local government policies and programs on women.

6. *Republic of Korea*. The government has worked closely with women's organizations on enhancing the status of women, improving legislation and institutions, promoting the value of gender equality, and developing gender equality agenda. This on-going partnership is based on the Women's Development Act, which stipulates that the government may provide women's NGOs with necessary administrative and financial assistance.
7. *Singapore*. The Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW consults women's groups on matters related to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
8. *Thailand*. The Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development (OWAFD) has established various types of partnership with NGOs. At the policy level, a coordinating body composed of GO and NGO representatives and gender experts has been established. At the implementation level, a memorandum of understanding has been signed between OWAFD and the National Council of Women, to effect a collaboration that would empower women. More memoranda of agreement are being prepared to deal with specific problems like violence against women, training of women for local elections and administrative positions.

OWAFD considers collaboration with the government, NGOs, civil society, local governments, and experts, as a strategy to achieve gender equality in Thailand.

9. *Vietnam*. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) in Vietnam cooperates closely with the women's organizations in research, involving them in activities based on their tasks and priorities. After the Beijing Conference and Beijing +5, NCFAW cooperated with NGOs to conduct conferences to disseminate information.

Thematic Partnerships: NGO Networks

Some partnerships are formed along thematic lines. This is illustrated in the Asia-Pacific NGO networks working on the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The following illustrative examples are offered.

1. *Women and Poverty*

The *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)*, is a network of women scholars and activists from the economic South. It works both globally and within regions, in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific. More specifically, it tackles the political economy of globalization, political restructuring and social transformation, sustainable livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health rights. To accomplish its goals, it undertakes research and analysis in support of its advocacy work towards gender mainstreaming and ensuring that governments uphold conference commitments. Information dissemination is carried out regionally through electronic networks. DAWN's capability building efforts target civil society.

2. *Education and Training of Women*

The *South Asian Network on Gender Trainers*, which is supported by UNIFEM, conducts capability building activities that promote self-awareness and skills enhancement in gender trainers.

The *Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)* is composed of human rights syndicates in South, Southeast, and Northeast Asia. Its advocacy work is geared towards the establishment of national and regional human rights mechanisms, with information sharing conducted through reports and publications. It also conducts training on human rights mechanisms.

3. *Women and Health*

The *Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Center for Women (ARROW)* specifically works on introducing a gender and rights approach to women's health, reproductive health, and population policies. This is done through information dissemination in its Information and Documentation Center, action research to support policy and program advocacy, and capability building in monitoring and advocacy.

The *Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility in Asia (CARAM-ASIA)* focuses on the themes indicated in its name. Networking across 10 countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, it is involved in information dissemination and stakeholder support through community-based interventions. Its undertakings in action research attempt to link health and development strategies.

4. *Violence Against Women*

The *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women – Asia Pacific (CATW-AP)* was organized on the sub-themes of women's rights, women's exploitation, and trafficking and prostitution. Appropriate to work on these sub-themes are its activities on research, documentation and publication, education, training, organizational development, networking and policy advocacy.

The Coalition has recently successfully lobbied for a definition of trafficking, which prevents the act and protects victims, through the Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

5. *Women and Armed Conflict*

The *Asian Women's Human Rights Council* Regional Secretariat operates in Asia and Pacific and its secretariat is based in India. It is composed of 15 Council Members from the Asia-Pacific region elected by the General Assembly. Its vision is to create alternative spaces where women can articulate the pain and anguish of their experiences: naming the crimes, seeking redress, demanding reparation. Its goal is to challenge the dominant human rights discourse which has left out the women and to seek a new generation of women's human rights.

6. *Women and the Economy*

The *International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN-ASIA)* is composed of seven regional networks of women involved in research, advocacy and promoting economic literacy on issues involving trade and development. It advocates equitable, social, and sustainable trade.

The *Jubilee South International Coordinating Committee* is composed of anti-debt campaign groups, social movements, people's organizations, community groups, political groups, and NGOs. It hopes to develop as an international south movement on debt by facilitating exchange of information, materials, and experiences and by conducting education, research and training services and activities.

7. *Women in Power and Decision-Making*

The *Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP)* works on the sub-themes of critical mass of women politicians, responsible female citizenry, and transformation of politics and governance. It conducts advocacy and networking, training, research and information sharing.

8. *Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women*

The *Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association (PPSEAWA)* has a membership composed of individuals and women's organizations. It promotes cooperation among women in the study and improvement of social, economic, and cultural conditions.

9. *Human Rights of Women*

The *Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)* was established on the sub-themes of law as an instrument for change and the empowerment of women, as they work for justice, peace, equality and development. To further these principles, they carry out policy advocacy, education, and training on the issues and concerns of poor and marginalized women. They also lobby for commitments in international conventions to be implemented by governments.

10. *Women and Media*

ISIS International, by using information and communications structures and systems, aims to promote the cause of women, particularly those from the South, both regionally and globally. Founded in Rome, it now has three independent offices in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

11. *Women and the Environment*

The *Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN)* builds the capability of indigenous peoples to undertake advocacy, education, and campaign work.

The *Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific (PAN-AP)* is a global coalition of groups and individuals working within the context of community experience in order to tackle the sub-themes of women in agriculture, food sovereignty and ecological agriculture, and pesticide use. It carries out extensive work in documentation, information dissemination, and campaigns. Its programs are gender and culture sensitive.

Gender Justice Awards (Philippines): A multi-sectoral partnership model

In the Philippines, the first Gender Justice Awards is a noteworthy example of multi-sectoral collaboration/partnership. A project initiated by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) and the UNIFEM East Asia and Southeast Asia Regional Office, it aimed to reward judges who, through their court decisions, demonstrated correct understanding of gender-related laws and exhibit gender sensitivity. No less than the Supreme Court co-sponsored the Gender Justice Awards. The entries were the court decisions penned by judges, male or female, on cases of violence against women and children and other forms of gender-related violence, nullification of marriage, prostitution, sexual harassment and any other cases rooted on discrimination against women. The objective was to help raise the quality of court decisions and inspire the judges to be gender-sensitive in hearing and deciding on cases. Raising the public's expectations on the court was another expected result. The Awards received good media coverage.

A female judge, Maria Nimfa Penaco-Sitaca of Branch 13 of the Regional Trial Court in Oroquieta City, a small and relatively unknown city in Southern Philippines, won the top award. The Jurors cited "her wise, compassionate, and gender-sensitive application of the law on sensitive cases of rape, prostitution, and nullity of marriage among others." One of the judges noted the elegance in the prose of Judge Sitaca's rulings and the absence of legalese, which made these more accessible to lay people.

Other than its obvious novelty and relevance, the Gender Justice Awards is an example of successful partnership. Practically all sectors of Philippine society pitched in to make it a success: the international development community, the Judiciary and Executive branches of government, civil society groups of legal and gender advocates and civic leaders, lawyers, academe, media and business. The seed money from UNIFEM, which was just enough to complete the search, screening and judging process, was quickly supplemented by UNDP and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The University of the Philippines' Center for Women's Studies provided voluntary services as project holder. Various individuals and organizations gave their time and expertise pro bono for screening the entries, raising award money and other gifts and many other tasks. The Awards demonstrated how an idea can turn into reality when there is full buy-in of stakeholders, and there is cooperation with all parties contributing what they do best without any concern for credit.

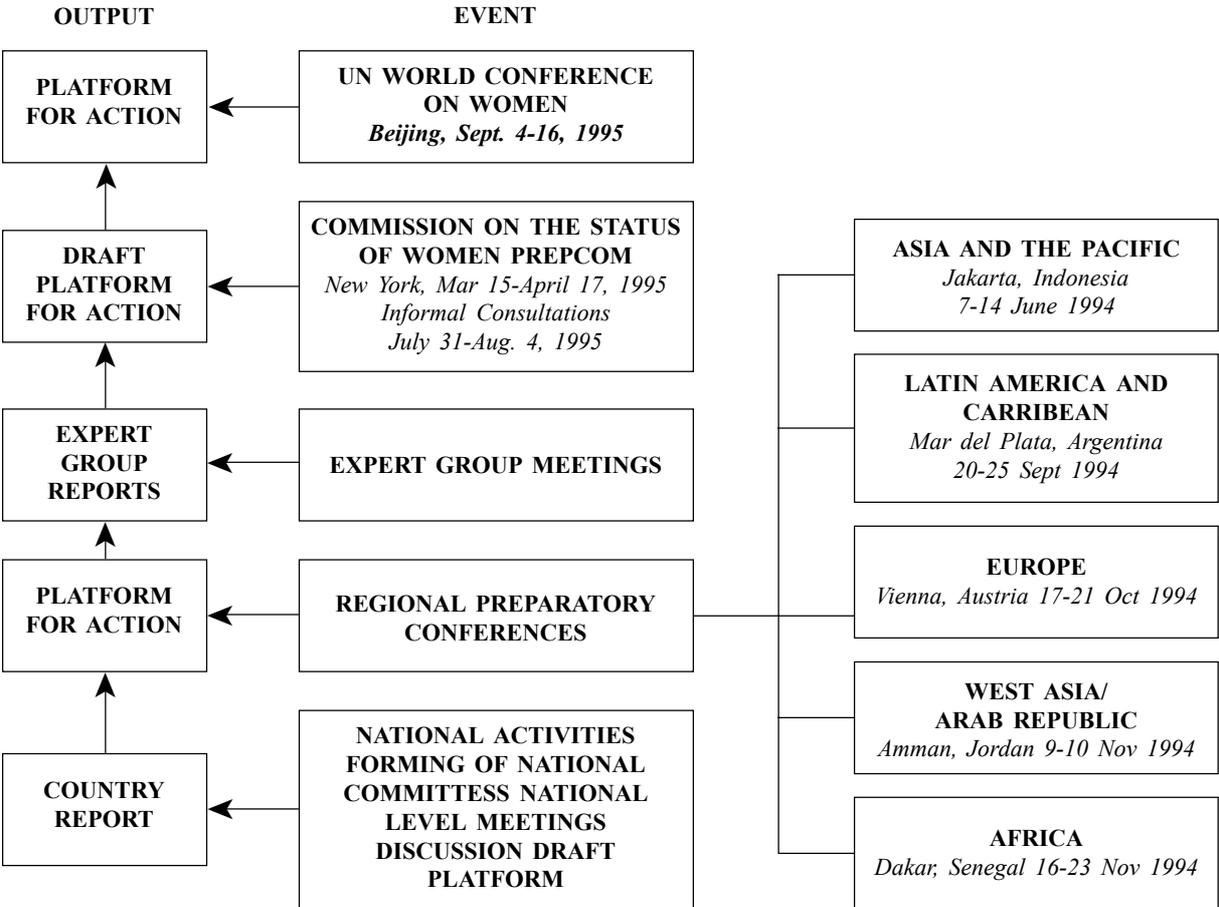
Beijing and Beyond: Partnerships in the Beijing Process

A review of the Beijing process reveals important partnerships in the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, at the Conference itself and in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

GO-NGO Partnership

The preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women involved a complex consultation process at national regional and global levels (see figure 1). This process involved GO-NGO partnership every step of the way.

Figure 1



CONSULTATIVE PROCESS FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

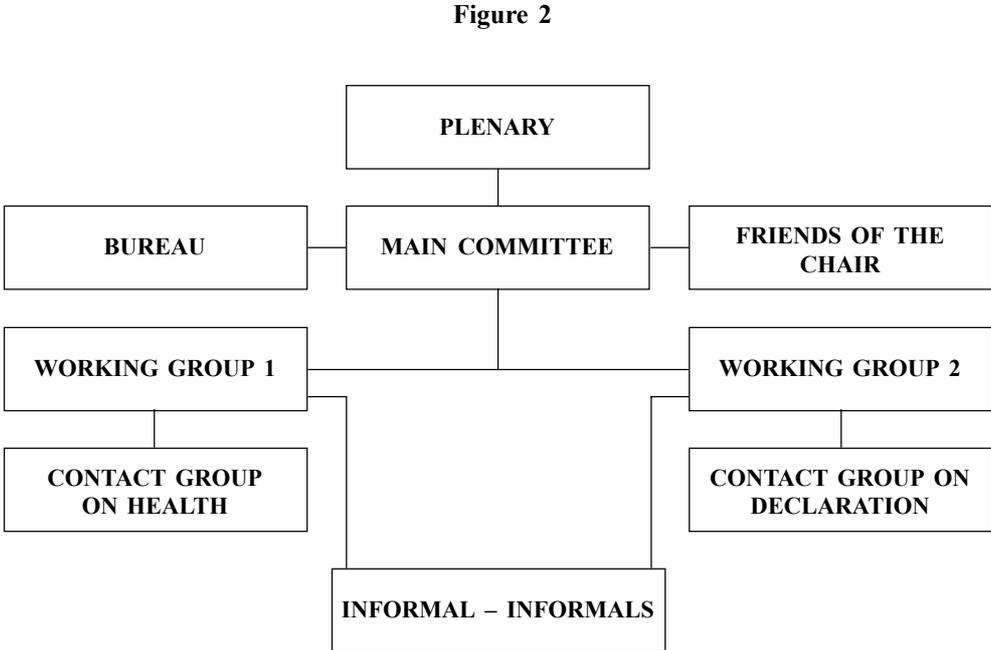
At the national level, as recommended by the General Assembly, national committees were set up to spearhead and coordinate preparatory activities for the FWCW. National activities included, among others, public education campaigns, discussion of country positions on key issues, workshops on the Draft Platform for Action and preparation of country reports.

Five Regional Preparatory meetings were organized by the U.N. Economic Commissions with a regional platform for action coming out of each one. These regional platforms reflected concerns common to all regions such as poverty; participation in the economy; human rights; and political participation and decision-making. The concerns of health, education, and the environment were in the platforms of the majority of the regions. While Africa was the only region with a special section on the girl-child, with the support of the Group of 77 and China, they were successful in getting this new section into the Platform for Action on the final days of the 39th CSW, the last PrepCom.

The Division on the Advancement of Women (DAW) also convened Expert Group Meetings focusing on the areas of: gender, education and training; women and economic decision-making; institutional and financial arrangements for the implementation of the Platform for Action; and gender and the agenda for peace. The outputs of the Regional Preparatory Meetings and the Expert Group Meetings were all inputs into the Draft Platform for Action prepared by the Secretariat and negotiated at the 39th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

This session of the CSW on March 15 to April 7 (an extension of 3 days was required of the original 3-week meeting) was actually the first time delegations examined and negotiated the Draft Platform for Action. At the end of the meeting, it was estimated that 20% of the draft remained in brackets. At the request of the Bureau (composed of the Chair and regional vice-chairs and representatives of the main negotiating groups), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) mandated a week of informal consultations held in New York on July 31 to August 4 to tackle outstanding issues with the understanding that agreements arrived at during the informal consultations would be honored by delegations in Beijing.

Figure 2 shows the organizational set-up of the FWCW.



At the Conference, the Plenary sessions and the meetings of the Main Committee were open to all delegates, NGOs and the media. The two working groups and the Contact Groups were open to delegates and NGOs but were closed to media. Only delegates had access to the informal informals.

Access to meetings particularly for NGOs was always a thorny issue. The problem began at the final PrepCom. It was planned that the Draft Platform for Action would have a first reading in the Main Committee where amendments could be proposed. After this first reading, open to all NGOs, the document

would then be negotiated in closed informal groups. However, for a number of reasons, among them the fact that the Secretariat draft had reached the delegations quite late and that it differed quite a bit from an earlier draft that had been sent out and also perhaps because many delegations had been preoccupied with the Social Summit and had insufficient time to meet and formulate group positions on the draft, the pace of the Main Committee was much slower than anticipated. After the first week, it became necessary for the Chair of the Main Committee to ask delegations to submit their amendments in writing so that the Secretariat could create a consolidated text which would then be negotiated in informals. Three groups were formed all working in small rooms. The physical constraints along with the strong objections of a few delegations prevented NGOs from entry into the negotiating groups. Since they had not had the full benefit of a first reading and amendments in the Main Committee, the NGOs felt left out.

The NGOs wanted to be sure that this exclusion was not repeated in Beijing. In Beijing most of the major meetings were open to NGOs subject to some system for controlling the numbers. In addition, most national delegations included NGO representatives and regular briefings for NGOs were conducted by the Secretariat as well as by delegations. Thus, there was general satisfaction with regard to NGO access.

But the battles on access were fought way before people reached Beijing. There was the first issue of accreditation of NGOs to the FWCW. NGOs accredited to ECOSOC automatically were accredited to the PrepCom as well as to the Conference but other NGOs were allowed to apply for accreditation. Their applications were screened by the Secretariat then approved by the CSW. This process was not without controversy and after the approval of the applications of some 1500 NGOs, the deadline for applications was extended. New, late or reconsidered applications were forwarded to the June ECOSOC meeting in Geneva.

The NGO access issue reached dramatic heights when at the PrepCom it was announced that the site of the NGO Forum had been moved from Beijing to Huairuo. This was viewed by the NGOs as a strategy to keep them away from the Conference. The move to Huairuo and the furor it caused became a serious distraction to the Bureau and the Secretariat during the PrepCom and for months after until the issue was resolved.

But in the final analysis the FWCW was highly participatory. The broad-based interest and involvement at the national, regional and global levels was unmistakable. The partnership with NGOs throughout the process, though not without tension, was unparalleled. In both the formal and informal processes of the Conference and its preparations, decision-making was participative and non-hierarchical.

The Conference benefited tremendously from the high degree of partnership and networking among women's groups since Nairobi. This highly participative and basically horizontal communication pattern combined with the emotionally-charged atmosphere (not to mention the variety of colors and costumes present) generated occasional misgivings among those who viewed the process as "chaotic".

I remember at the PrepCom, assuring a well-meaning male ambassador from one of the larger delegations that while his concerns about organizational and management aspects of the Conference and its preparation were well-taken, he would have to appreciate the positive difference between the Women's Conference and the typically grey-suit, hierarchical, formal and male atmosphere of U.N. meetings. The Beijing process de-mystified the processes and procedures of U.N. meetings. And in China almost ten years ago, it is estimated that about 50,000 people attended the FWCW in Beijing and the NGO Forum in Huairuo.

Without a doubt, the Platform for Action that came out of the FWCW was as much a product of NGO lobbying and even actual drafting as it was a product of government negotiations. In the Asia and Pacific Region, GO-NGO partnership was intense and of very high quality. Our region set the standard for the other regions as we held the first of the regional NGO Forums in Manila and the first regional preparatory meeting in Jakarta. As I attended the other regional preparatory meeting in Mar del Plata, Vienna, Aman, and Dakar as chair of the UNCSW and the Preparatory Commission to the FWCW, I was always asked about the GO-NGO partnership in our Asia Pacific process.

NGO Partnership

Asia-Pacific NGOs formed valuable partnerships among themselves in the preparations for the Beijing Conference. In 1993 the first regional NGO Preparatory Meeting was held in Manila. The Asia Pacific NGO Working Group was formed and the "Yellow Book" containing the outputs from the regional meeting was published. The "Yellow Book" became a lobbying tool at the High Level Intergovernmental Meeting in Jakarta and at the 39th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York and contributed much to the content of the draft Platform for Action.

After Beijing, the efforts of the Asia Pacific NGO Working Group (reconvening as Asia Pacific Watch) were directed toward the monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In preparation for the Beijing +5 Review, Asia Pacific NGOs held a Regional NGO Symposium in Thailand in October 1999. The outcomes of that meeting were contained in the report, "Asia-Pacific Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty First Century" referred to as "The Big Blue Book." After the Symposium, the Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW) was born as the regional focal point for regional Beijing-related activities.

In June, 2004 The Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing +10 was held in Thailand. Initiated by APWW, which served as the secretariat, the Forum was organized by a Convenors Group composed of 50 regional NGOs. Over 700 participants from all over the region attended the Forum held at Mahidol University, Salaya, Nakornpathom, Thailand. The highly successful Forum produced a statement and the "Purple Book" both of which are shared with governments at this High Level Meeting.

There was some concern that there would be little interest in the AP-NGO Forum and that it would not be possible to organize it in the short period of five months. But these fears were unfounded as the AP-NGO Forum revealed the continued strength of Asia Pacific NGO partnerships.

Networking and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Networking is a special type of partnership that has been a strong component of the women's movement since the 1970s. Networking is actively seeking relationships with others to exchange knowledge, information and experiences and to build alliances to develop and implement new ways of doing things. An international network is a transnational partnership of organizations.

Networks and networking are powerful tools for women's empowerment. They make it possible to:

1. enhance and deepen critical thinking and creativity by encouraging dialogue and exchange of ideas, experience and strategies among diverse groups and organizations.
2. address global problems through global action by enabling many different kinds of groups to join forces.
3. respect diversity while working together. There is the understanding that problems and issues affect different groups differently. With this understanding comes the recognition that there is also no single strategy or action that can be taken to address an issue. Networking allows for those differences to be joined in dealing with problems, while respecting diversity.
4. transcend isolation and strengthen local action. Being part of a network can strengthen the actions of individuals or groups by linking them to others, whether within the network or even from other networks. Working as part of a larger effort is empowering especially for locally-based individuals or groups as they are strengthened by the knowledge that they are doing their work in concert with others or that their efforts are at least backed up by others.
5. increase people's potential for social and political action. Strategic networking enables ordinary people in different parts of the world to assert their demands and claim their share of power that is mostly held by the State and the marketplace.
6. link local and international organizing efforts and structures. Local work is strengthened by bringing into a local situation the experience and perspective of international work. In turn, international work is also strengthened by bringing in local support from many different places.
7. be inclusive. Networks and networking allow individuals and an organization to engage with a network on their own terms, participating in different ways.
8. have flexible and quick response to new situations. Groups and individuals can engage and respond quickly to new situations without bureaucratic process. Network members are free to either join or not join certain initiatives, depending on their agreement with these initiatives.
9. accomplish more together than alone. Working together, sharing ideas, experiences and information, respecting each other's diversity, pooling of resources and energy results in a social synergy.

The Increasing Use of the New ICTs by the Women's Movement

More and more women's groups and networks are using the different facilities or forms of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) led by computer- and Internet-based applications such as Internet websites, electronic mail or E-mail, online discussion/E-mail lists, chatrooms, electronic commerce or E-commerce, and multimedia presentations. These new ICTs are used for wider and stronger networking; for more rapid and wider-reach information and communication access, sharing, and dissemination; for transcending isolation of issues and strategies by being able to share information and communicate swiftly across states, regions, countries, and continents; for linking local issues to regional and global strategies and actions; for inclusiveness among those who have Internet access but have the potential of reaching non-Internet-access populations by linking and converging technologies to expand the information base. Women's groups are increasingly using the new ICTs to carry out meetings online, to send information to each other quickly, and to collaborate, plan together and keep in touch with one another in ways that previously had not been possible.

The earlier form of the new ICTs was the facsimile or fax machine, which allowed documents to be sent immediately via phone lines. The International Women's Tribune Center (IWTC) is one of the most successful examples of how the fax was used in the women's movement. The use of the "FaxNet" was hailed as one of the main tools that generated the information and solidarity that led to the very successful turnout during the Beijing Conference in 1995.

At that time, some women were already beginning to turn to E-mail and the Internet as sources and means of information sharing and communication. At the Beijing Conference, the Association for Progressive Communicators (APC) established a central E-mail center to teach women how to use the new ICTs. For many women in the Asia-Pacific region, this was a totally new experience as the region had yet to experience the ICT boom then already occurring in the US and parts of Europe in the early to mid-nineties.

However, the lag for the region was short. From 1995 to the present, most of the major women's organizations in major Asian cities have access to the new ICTs. This access has enabled the different organizations to have greater and easier communication with one another locally and regionally and even internationally.

This new form of communicating and organizing became most evident during the Beijing +5 Review in 2000 in New York. While just five years before in the preparations for Beijing, the facsimile or fax machine had been the mode of communication among the women, Beijing + 5 used to advantage the tools of the new ICTs. Onsite reports of the meetings and discussions were quickly dispatched to all parts of the world through E-mail and Internet. Women participants kept in close contact with their countries through E-mail, sharing information back and forth, and keeping up to date on their family and friends. The UN along with APC and other women's groups had set up E-mail centers for the women. But the women no longer needed basic instructions on how to use the new technologies. The E-mail centers were abuzz with women comfortably using Web-based tools for information sharing.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the Beijing +5 NGO Symposium was organized in three months through E-mail and the Internet. This year the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum for Beijing + 10 used E-mail and websites even more extensively. All the Forum's committees used E-mail lists in working and planning out each of their respective tasks. Registration was carried out through the Internet, and registration fees were collected using credit cards as one of the features in the online registration. Indeed, networking in the women's movement has benefited greatly from the availability of the new information and communication technologies.

The New ICTs: Words of Caution

The benefits to be obtained from using the new ICTs for wider and stronger networking, cannot be discounted. However, new ICTs-based networking is not without its problems. Large women's NGOs in urban settings now use E-mail and Internet to communicate with regional and international organizations and funders but linkages to women at the national level or in the rural communities continue to be sparse and few. Women who have access to the new ICTs report problems of not having enough time to work on their Internet skills because of multiple job demands and reproductive home demands. Under-utilization of existing equipment is often reported because of lack of time and skills to maximise its use. Language is a major obstacle since English continues to be the language of the Internet. Lack of resources is often cited by

women's NGOs as a problem for access and use of the new information technologies as connection cost, hardware, software all add up to expenses that many women find prohibitive. Lack of State policies that address women's needs and issues make it difficult for women to make use of the new technologies. Social and psychological constraints make the technologies more attractive and accessible to males rather than females. The general conclusion seems to be that despite changes and increased access to the new technologies in the region, women for the most part, are still marginalized.

Regional Cooperation

So far, the discussion has centered on partnerships among sectors, where governments, whether sub-national or national, are frequent players. We now turn to a more homogeneous type of grouping, that of countries in the region, represented by national governments. The collaboration that these groups undertake is what we often refer to as regional cooperation.

The reasons for forming partnerships apply to regional cooperation. However, in the context of globalization, the efficiency argument holds even more weight. By bonding together, countries achieve economies of scale thereby enabling them to operate more efficiently and more competitively (UNESCAP, 2004).

Closer to the issues of women's empowerment and gender equality, however, is the reality that efforts of governments to provide safety nets notwithstanding, trends do affect the livelihood, safety, and well-being of vulnerable sectors. Invariably, these vulnerable sectors include women, children, indigenous groups, the differently abled, and the elderly. Since the resulting problems, such as trafficking of persons, degradation of natural resources, and lost livelihoods, cross national borders, regional cooperation becomes imperative.

Due to sheer size of land mass and population, and diversity in cultures and economic advancement, regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific has actually come by way of sub-regional groupings. These are described below, paying particular attention to each group's basis for cooperation and its treatment of gender issues.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The ASEAN was established in 1967 in Bangkok by the five original member countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It has since included Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia in its ranks. The ASEAN Declaration speaks of a twofold objective – economic growth, social progress, and cultural development; and regional peace and stability. In 1995, the heads of states and government reaffirmed the goals of cooperative peace and shared prosperity.

ASEAN's success on the political front is notable as it practiced the principles of consensus decision-making and non-interference in the domestic affairs of member countries. A wider base for cooperation to include economic and social concerns was affirmed in the Bali Summit of 1976 (UNESCAP, 2004).

The collective stand of the ASEAN on gender issues is embodied in two documents. The *Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region* (Bangkok, 1988) recognized that women constituted half of the population of the ASEAN region and that they assume multiple roles in the family, society, and nation. Their active roles as agents in and beneficiaries of development were also highlighted. The Declaration called for the integration of the concerns of women in national plans, the promotion of community and non-governmental women organizations, and the strengthening of international women's forums.

A more recent document, the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region* (Jakarta, 2004) was drafted in consonance with the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The ASEAN Declaration called for cooperation most notably in the following areas:

1. research, collection, analysis, and dissemination of data by sex, age, and other relevant information;
2. an integrated approach to eliminating violence against women which consists of the provision of services for survivors, taking appropriate responses to offenders and perpetrators, understanding the causes and nature of violence, and changing societal behavior and attitude;

3. gender mainstreaming in policies and programs, procedures and processes;
4. supporting legislation and institutional mechanisms;
5. promotion of the economic independence of women, and their full enjoyment of human rights;
6. educational and social measures preventing violence against women, which includes compliance monitoring, involvement of community-based players, and training of legal officers, social workers, and health personnel.

Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

Established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, the ECO has since increased its membership to 10 Central Asian countries. Largely, it works on economic objectives such as the promotion of intra-regional trade and the development of transport and communications. However, it also seeks regional cooperation in drug abuse control, ecological and environmental protection, and strengthening of historical and cultural ties. Work towards the achievement of these objectives could be compatible with the pursuit of women empowerment and gender equality. There is however, no explicit focus on women at present.

Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum is composed of the heads of government of the independent and self-governing Pacific Island countries, Australia and New Zealand. Since 1971, these countries have engaged in cooperation activities in the region. The bases for cooperation include economic policy, trade and investment, corporate sector development, and political and international legal affairs. Cooperation has also been established in education, gender, ICT, aviation, sustainable development, and energy. (UNESCAP, 2004)

The Forum Secretariat's Vision Statement addresses themes central to gender concerns. For example, it stipulates that natural resources are developed with preservation and sustainability in mind. Indigenous values, traditions, and customs are also respected and promoted. It also upholds international economic cooperation that is based on equity, broad-based participation, and self-reliance.

The Vision Statement categorically states that "material progress is matched by improvement in the quality of people's lives, including human development, equality between women and men, and protection of children".

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

The SAARC was established in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1985. It is composed of seven countries, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its Charter embodies its objectives, which include economic growth, social progress, and cultural development; collective self-reliance in the region; collaboration and mutual assistance; and cooperation with other international organizations.

Regional cooperation is pursued in trade, child and women development, food security, combating terrorism and drug abuse, infrastructure and development, cultural exchange, and environmental protection. Some of its conventions are relevant to gender work, namely, convention to combat trafficking (2002), and convention on the promotion of child welfare (2002)

The Islamabad Declaration of the SAARC Twelfth Summit (January 2004) recognizes the progress made in the constitution of the SAARC Autonomous Advocacy Group of Prominent Women Personalities (SAWAG). The Declaration further states that an area of regional cooperation is the promotion of women entrepreneurs who will contribute to socio-economic development. It also enjoins its member states to work for the early ratification of the two Conventions on Child Welfare and Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

The APEC was established in 1989 to enhance economic growth and prosperity in the region and to strengthen the Asia-Pacific community. It is composed of 21 member economies, which collectively accounts for more than a third of the world's population and about 60 percent of the world gross domestic product. The Cooperation's scope of work is embodied in what it refers to as its "three pillars". These are trade and investment liberalization, business facilitation, and economic and technical cooperation.

The Gender Focal Point Network is APEC's way of acknowledging women's contribution to the APEC economies and the need to promote gender equality in the region. The Network's goal is to provide information and support linkages that will advance the economic interests of women in the region. It also implements the Framework for the Integration of Women in APEC, and supports the work of the Advisory Group on Gender Integration.

Among the recent accomplishments of the Network are:

1. monitoring the implementation of the following projects: *The Economic Contributions of Women and Men in APEC Economies: the Need for Sex-Disaggregated Data*, *and the Gender Resource Kit*; and
2. initiating the establishment of the *Register of Gender Experts and the Register of Best Practices on Gender Mainstreaming*

The Women Leaders Network is an advisory body of the APEC. It has made specific recommendations relevant to the theme of Women and the Economy. These include promoting access to financial services for women and small micro enterprises, providing incentives for comprehensive programs on women empowerment, and collecting and disseminating data on the contribution of women to the informal sector.

Regional Cooperation Bodies: Untapped Potential

It would seem that regional or sub-regional cooperation bodies have not fully embraced gender issues as a major part of their agenda. Explicit concern for the situation and status of women and focused programs for women's empowerment are present in some but not all of these bodies. Where gender issues are explicit in their mandates one may still raise the valid point of what kind of priority these issues are given relative to economic and political issues. Thus these regional partnerships remain an untapped potential for the cause of women in the region.

Problems, Perils and Pitfalls of Partnership

Partnerships, while generally desirable and beneficial to partners and their goals, are not without problems. Some of these problems are:

Unequal Partnerships

Partnership implies equal participation and control over decision-making and outcomes. When significantly more power or resources lie with one or more of the partners, problems may arise. This is most problematic in GO-NGO partnerships where government is usually the dominant partner with greater power. Much depends on the context of the partnership and the existence of genuine democratic space in countries. Without this, so-called partnerships may be no more than token gestures or even actual co-optation. Even the most democratic governments are ambivalent about relinquishing too much power to NGOs for various reasons. Among these reasons are: fear of losing control, suspicion about hidden agenda, incompatibility of working styles. Unequal partnerships can also exist among NGOs with larger, better connected and better funded NGOs being "more equal" than others.

Ideological Clashes

Ideological differences can pose serious constraints on partnerships of all kinds. Conservative and patriarchal governments will always find trouble working with all except the most traditional NGOs. Feminist NGOs are basically uncomfortable with government. Different perspectives on such pressing issues as globalization, militarization, reproductive health, religious fundamentalism make partnerships difficult and possibly even unrealistic. Even among NGOs where there is consensus and commitment on many issues, agreement in all areas is often difficult. The statement that came out of the recent AP-NGO forum was too strongly worded for some and not strong enough for others. In the organization of the Forum and in the formation of the Convenors Group, the recurring silent question was which groups could or could not work with each other. NGOs differ as well in their comfort-level working with government and even with the U.N.

Style Conflicts

Partnerships can be challenged by style differences. In GO-NGO partnerships, NGOs may find government procedures and requirements simply too bureaucratic while governments are uncomfortable with the informality and seeming lack of organization of many NGOs. Even among NGOs, some are more formal and hierarchical than others leading to tension. Different cultural styles have ruffled a few feathers even among groups basically working for the same cause. Differences along the direct-indirect continuum, the English-speaking-non-English speaking continuum, the formal-informal continuum have posed communication challenges in the NGO community. Some NGOs find the formality and ritual of government events a “turn off”. This sometimes becomes an issue even among NGOs, particularly in regional NGO meetings where one has to find just the right balance between sensibilities—respecting protocol and seniority without being too hierarchical, being gracious and hospitable without being extravagant or ostentatious, being efficient and task-oriented while remaining nice and friendly.

Leadership Issues

Leadership and representation issues still hound efforts at partnership. While genuine cooperation and sharing have been major products of the Beijing process, competition still rears its ugly head. Women NGOs and networks can be distracted from more substantive issues by the concern over what group or whose representative gets to be included/invited to meetings, gets to speak, gets to represent the broader coalition or network. Some competition and negative stereotyping still exists between groups. For regional and international networks, there is the issue of representativeness of the women who attend international meetings and their actual links with women in their home countries. In some regions, it is the English-speaking women who get to attend all the regional and international meetings. At times U.N. agencies and organizers of meetings do not take the extra effort to discover new representatives and new partners. At the same time, the responsibility lies with women who are frequently invited to these meetings, to bring in new people. The development of a successor generation of partners should be a priority.

Sustainability of Partnerships

A major problem of partnership is their sustainability. Experience points to the fact that partnerships between GO-NGOs and among NGOs were strongest in the preparation for Beijing and immediately after the Conference after which these partnerships were much less active. This is evident both at the national and regional levels. While there was some renewed interest and activity for Beijing +5 and some again for Beijing +10, the fact is mechanisms for sustaining partnerships post Beijing were not well established. While governments were initially quite diligent in organizing GO-NGO consultations in the early post-Beijing period, genuine GO-NGO efforts at monitoring the implementation of the Platform are few and far between. Even NGO partnerships tended to focus more on participation in the Beijing-related activities rather than on actual implementation and monitoring of the Platform.

A possible contributory factor is the dwindling of material support for the implementation of the Platform and particularly for monitoring and evaluation. Another possible culprit is “gender mainstreaming” which was a favorite post-Beijing strategy for women’s empowerment but which seems to be suffering from lack of clarity of the original concept and actual misuse in the hands of those whose commitment to women’s empowerment may be suspect. Thus, in the name of gender mainstreaming there may be a serious watering down and diffusion of attention from the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Challenge of Partnerships

Ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, what are the challenges faced by the partnerships we have formed over the years? How can these partnerships be genuine value-added mechanisms for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for the empowerment of women? The environment for women today is not quite what it was ten years ago. At the Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing +10 we celebrated our gains at the same time that we confronted persistent and emerging issues.

The statement of the Forum reads:

“We celebrate the Beijing Platform for Action as a strategic document for women’s empowerment, human rights and development that has catalyzed women to organize, act and search for alternatives. With the Platform, women’s movements have deepened understanding, expanded recognition and broadened

definitions, perspectives and strategies for women's human rights, empowerment and development, as well as for transnational networking and solidarity." We celebrated gains in the implementation of some critical areas of concern of the Platform. We celebrated the personal and organizational transformation of women and their organizations. We celebrated our partnerships.

But while the enabling environment has improved in some areas, there are issues and trends of deep concern: the diminishing of political will and commitment of governments to implement the Platform for Action, shifts in the macro-environment that have eroded women's status, the consequences of backlash against women and their choices.

Again quoting from the AP-NGO Forum statement, "...in the midst of...major challenges, we declare our resolve

- to carry on the spirit and realize the intent of Beijing and to celebrate our gains over the last ten years
- to protect one another as defenders of women's human rights and peace and
- to assert ourselves as equal partners in the creation of a just, democratic, human and peaceful world."

What are the challenges our partnerships face?

Our partnerships have to confront gaps and emerging issues. Our partnerships have to regain our earlier enthusiasm and commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. Our partnerships have to view themselves more as monitoring and pressure groups rather than as simply representative groups with token or ceremonial functions. There simply are too much review and recommendation exercises and not enough hard-nosed monitoring of both government and NGO action and implementation of commitments. At the same time, emerging issues must be confronted and the root causes and impact on women's lives more fully understood and made visible. The AP-NGO statement calls attention to "crises caused by neo-liberal globalization, war, militarisms and extremisms in interplay with persistent patriarchy."

Our partnerships have to be strengthened. Among the challenges in this area is the re-inventing of GO-NGO partnerships. New challenges in the policy environment demand new capacities and skills that most national women's machineries are often hard put to meet. National machineries for women need to recover their links with the women's movement and to re-invent this relationship that may have gone stale. They can re-balance their effort toward giving attention to supporting the innovative ideas and actions of women NGOs and providing spaces for the encounter between them and policy-makers. National Machineries for women should "think out of the box" that is, they should see themselves as having a role to play in government as much as they have a role to play in the women's movement.

As we urge for the re-envisioning of GO-NGO partnerships, so too must we ask for the revitalization of the women's movements through more networking and coalition formation as well as regeneration of our networks and coalitions by seeking younger women to take our place.

Women's groups and networks need to form partnerships with other social movements and give attention to issues such as globalization/trade liberalization and war. Partnership with a broader range of social activists will ensure that discrimination against women is well-understood and mainstreamed into their agenda and at the same time will deepen our analysis and understanding of the broader political and structural forces that determine the lives of women. It is only with these broader and deeper perspectives and partnerships, without losing our focus on women's issues, that we can truly effect the changes we seek and create and sustain an enabling environment for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Statement of the Asia Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing + 10 concludes:

"We recognize the efforts of governments and the UN system to realize the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. We strongly urge them to safeguard the gains, secure the commitments, and ensure full and effective implementation.

We, in turn, will strengthen our efforts, continuing to draw on our diverse experiences and creativities, our struggles and hopes, our constructive debates. In solidarity with marginalized groups, we commit ourselves to work with other social movements in enlarging our struggle for a better world for future generations!"

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Regional Networks Doing Work Relevant to the Beijing Critical Areas of Concern

Information on these regional networks were accessed from their respective websites, as follows:

Asia Indigenous People's Pact	http://www.forests.org/archive/asia/tribrigh.htm/
Asia Monitor Resource Center	http://www.amrc.org.hk/
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)	http://www.apwld.org/
Asia Pacific Human Rights Information Centre	http://www.hurights.or.jp/
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia)	http://www.forumasia.org/
Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development	http://www.afppd.org/
Asian Human Rights Commission	http://www.ahrchk.net/
Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN)	http://skyinet.net/~tebtebba/programmes.htm
Asian Women's Human Rights Council – Regional Secretariat	http://www.awhrc.com/
Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)	http://www.inet.co.th/org/ncwt/asiapac.htm
Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics	http://www.capwip.org/
Coalition Against Trafficking in Women – Asia Pacific, South Asia Women's Watch	http://www.catw-ap.org/
Committee for Asian Women – Bangkok	http://www.asian-migrants.org/
Coordination of Action on AIDS and Mobility in Asia	http://www.caramasia.org/
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)	http://www.dawn.org.fj/
Focus on the Global South	http://www.focusweb.org
Global Alliance Against Trafficking for Women (GAATW)	http://www.gaatw.org
International Gender and Trade Network	http://www.genderandtrade.net/
International Women's Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific	http://www.iwraw-ap.org/
ISIS International – Manila	http://www.isiswomen.org/
Jubilee South International Coordinating Committee	http://www.jubileesouth.net
Pan-Pacific and South-East Asian Women's Association (PPSEAWA)	http://www.ppseawa.org/about.html/
Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific (PAN-AP)	http://www.panap.net/
South Asian Network on Gender, Law and Governance	http://www.sarn-glg.net/
The Association of Progressive Communication – Women's Network Support Programme (APC/WN'SP)	http://www.apc.org/english/index.shtml

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Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), 2003. *About APEC*, accessed from http://www.apec.org/content/apec/about_apec.html, 4 September 2004.

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MEN'S ROLES IN THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

*Dr. Michael Flood (Australia)**

Introduction

Men's role in the achievement of gender equality is now on the international agenda. The belief that it is desirable to involve men in efforts towards gender equality is rapidly becoming institutionalised in the philosophies and programs of international organisations. The question of male involvement is now being explored in relation to such diverse fields as interpersonal violence, development, sexual and reproductive health, parenting and families, and work and economy.

How is it that men's and boys' roles in progress towards gender equality is now the subject of such attention? This is the outcome of over three decades of social change. The women's movements and feminism have offered a wide-ranging critique of the attitudes, practices and cultures among men which sustain gender inequality. There have been disruptions to and contestations of the social organisation of gender in at least three realms. In power relations, the legitimacy of men's domination has weakened dramatically, in particular under the influence of global feminism. Production relations in capitalist countries have undergone fundamental changes since World War II, for example, with married women's increased entry into paid employment and the decline of traditionally male areas of primary industry. There have been important shifts in sexual relations, in particular with the emergence and stabilisation of lesbian and gay sexualities as public alternatives to heterosexuality (Connell 1995: 84-85). Finally, cultural representations of manhood are changing, and new images of men are appearing. Traditional images of manhood now sit side by side with newer images of the involved father, the sensitive boyfriend, and the 'metrosexual'.

Social, economic, and political shifts have dented the old rules of manhood. Males now are faced with contradictory expectations about how to behave. Men are asking themselves, "Should I be a stoic breadwinner or a nurturing father, a 'real man' or a sensitive metrosexual?" Some men are confused, lost, or angry. But many men are flourishing. They are enjoying having fairer and more trusting relationships with their wives and partners, developing greater connections with female and male friends, and being involved fathers to their new babies and children. There are other signs of positive change among men. Young men are taking greater responsibility for contraception and safe sex, fewer males agree with myths about domestic violence, and more men are throwing themselves into involved and quality fathering.

Men's lives have been questioned and debated with passion, beginning in the 1980s and 1990s in advanced capitalist countries and increasingly in other countries. Men have been interrogated 'as a sex, in a way until recently reserved for women – as a problem' (Segal 1993: x).

Men show a variety of public responses to these shifts in gender relations, from active support for feminism to efforts to shore up male privilege. Small groups and networks of men across the globe, often in collaboration with women, are engaged in public efforts in support of gender equality, and men's anti-violence activism is the most visible and well-developed aspect of such efforts (Flood 2001). On the other hand, 'men's rights' and 'fathers' rights' groups are engaged in an energetic defence of patriarchal masculinity and men's power, particularly in families (Flood 2003: 37-42).

Beginning in the mid 1990s, men's role in progress towards gender equality has been the subject of growing international commitments and activity. In the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, governments expressed their determination to encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality. This was reaffirmed and extended in the follow-up meeting in 2000. The role of men and boys has also been addressed by other intergovernmental fora, including the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its review session (2000), as well as the special session

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of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS of 2001. Across the globe, a wide variety of initiatives focused on or inclusive of men are proliferating in such fields as men's violence against women, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and fatherhood and families.

In the most recent international expression of this trend, 'the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality' was one of the themes adopted for the forty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2004, New York. Part of the preparation for this undertaken by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) was an Expert Group Meeting, held in Brazil on 21-24 October 2003. I attended the meeting, along with 13 other invited experts from Brazil, Bulgaria, Fiji, India, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Sweden, the US, the UK, and Yemen, as well as 24 observers largely from Brazil.

Our goal in the Expert Group Meeting was to clarify the roles that men and boys could play in achieving gender equality. In both plenary sessions and smaller working groups, we assessed approaches which have been successful in engaging men and boys in gender equality, identified obstacles to their participation, and began to map out the roles of governments, the private sector, civil society, and communities in encouraging men's contributions. Over the final two days, at breakneck speed, we wrote an Expert Group Report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations addressed to different actors at different levels. The Expert Group (2003) Report provided the basis for a report of the Secretary-General on this theme to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2004.

Why then should men be involved in efforts towards gender equality, and if so, how?

Why involve men?

At its broadest, the impetus for involving men in work on gender equality is based on the recognition that men are both part of the problem and part of the solution. Gender injustice will only cease when men join with women to put an end to it. Many men's attitudes and behaviours will need to change in order for gender equality to be achieved. Many men participate in sexist practices and the maintenance of unjust gender relations, men often play a crucial role as 'gatekeepers' of the current gender order and as decision makers and community leaders, and patterns of gender injustice are tied to social constructions of masculinity and male identity. In addition, men's own health and wellbeing are limited by contemporary constructions of manhood (Kaufman 2003: 1-3). As the Commission on the Status of Women agreed in its forty-eighth session in New York in March this year, men and boys, through taking responsibility themselves and working jointly in partnership with women and girls, are essential to achieving the goals of gender equality, development and peace. (Commission on the Status of Women 2004: 1)

What are some examples from the Asia-Pacific region of this recognition? In the field of sexual and reproductive health, feminist researchers have begun to investigate men's experiences of reproductive health. The International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG) began a project in 1999 focused on male involvement, involving participants from Malaysia, the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, and Nigeria (Abdullah 2001: 15-16). In Malaysia, as gender awareness has developed within the credit cooperative movement, men have been encouraged to increase their share of household and domestic labour, and male-only 'men's clubs' have been adopted as tools for developing men's self-awareness and gender-sensitivity (Sinappan 2001: 42). In Vietnam, Care International has run the project 'Men In The Know', developing sexuality training for men to promote safer sex within relationships. As with much of the work among men, this project's focus on men came initially out of women's needs and concerns. In a previous course for women, the women expressed a desire for their male partners to receive training in women's sexuality and safer sex (Doyle 2000; 2002).

Agendas of gender equality have been widely seen as the concerns of women and not men. It was women, of course, who placed gender issues on the public agenda. The logic goes that, given that it is women who are disadvantaged by gender inequality, it is women who have a claim for redress, and thus gender issues are of no concern to men. However, this logic can no longer be sustained, for as Connell (2003: 3) notes: 'Men and boys are unavoidably involved in gender issues.' Most immediately, men (or more accurately, specific groups of men) control the resources required to implement women's claims for justice. But, more broadly, gender inequalities are based in gender relations, in the complex webs of relationships that exist at every level of human experience (Connell 2003: 3).

Including men in gender equality work is necessary because gender inequality is intimately tied to men's practices and identities, men's participation in complex and diverse gender relations, and masculine discourses and culture. Fostering gender equality requires change in these same arenas, of men's lives and relations. At the same time, involving men in efforts towards gender equality runs the risk of reinforcing men's existing power and jeopardising resources and funding directed at women (Kaufman 2003: 5). The goal of promoting gender justice must be central, as I discuss in more detail below.

Rather than seeing men only as obstacles to women's empowerment, it is also worth recognising that some men already are playing a role in fostering gender equality. Some men are living already in gender-just ways. They respect and care for the women and girls in their lives, and they reject traditional, sexist norms of manhood. Individual men in trade unions and government organisations have been important advocates for women's rights. Small numbers of men are engaged in public efforts in support of gender equality, in such fields as violence against women, HIV/AIDS, and schooling.

In the Asia-Pacific region, some of the most powerful examples of male support for gender equality are centred on the issue of violence against women. In 1997 in Katmandu, Nepal, at the UNICEF, UNIFEM and UNDP sponsored Regional Meeting 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in South Asia', the 100 or so men present added the following statement to the Katmandu Commitment which was issued; 'We men, realizing that no sustainable change can take place unless we give up the entrenched ideas of male superiority, commit ourselves to devising new role models of masculinity.' (UNICEF, 1998, cited in Hayward, 1999: 9) In the Philippines, the Kauswagan Community Social Centre had been working on violence against women, and in the late 1990s its staff developed a growing interest in the links between violence and men's roles or masculinity (Ragas 2001: 29-31). The Centre received funding to conduct the Southeast Asian Regional Workshop on Men's Role in Violence Against Women. This conference, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, was intended to 'support the emerging movement of community groups involving men in advocacy and campaigns on violence against women.'¹ It was held in the Philippines on 16-20 April 2001, and attracted participants from Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

In Cambodia, the Cambodian Men's Network is 'an alliance of men from all walks of life, religions and ethnicities who are committed to the eradication of violence against women for a fairer and more just society'.² The network aims 'to encourage men to be good models for young men in the society, to campaign against social trends that give impunity to violence against women and to advocate for positive change.' The Cambodian Men's Network has run the White Ribbon Campaign, an international campaign to encourage men to wear a white ribbon to show their support for stopping violence against women.

Some projects working with men in the Asia-Pacific region aim both to lessen gender inequalities and to address men's health. In 2002, men from American Samoa, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu participated in the Pacific Men's Health Workshop. Run by the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance in conjunction with the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji, the five-day workshop aimed to increase Pacific men's knowledge and skills in addressing issues of sexual and reproductive health and to establish networks among health workers and policy-makers across the Pacific (Kenyon et al. 2003). 'Masculinity, Mental Health and Violence' is a three year project in Fiji, Kiribati, and Papua New Guinea, and addresses young men's poor mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, and crime and violence (especially violence against women).³ A 1998 project on reproductive health in the Philippines worked with a federation of tricycle drivers outside Manila. Male peer educators ran workshops among the drivers, and the drivers then disseminated health messages through their vehicles and at passenger terminals (Bacudo 2001: 33-34).

The agenda of engaging men in gender issues is not novel because of whom it addresses, but how. Men have long been the target of public policy efforts – as workers and bosses, as husbands and fathers, as perpetrators or survivors of crime, as patients, and so on. But men have been largely treated as generic and ungendered human beings, representatives of all humanity, and the specifically gendered character of men's

¹ <http://www.wao.org.my/news/20010509menandviolence.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

² <http://www.bigpond.com.kh/users/gad/cmn/cmnfront.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

³ <http://www.fsfi.org/fj/program/masculinity.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

lives and relations has been ignored or taken for granted. This has perpetuated masculine norms and gender inequalities. The agenda of engaging men is novel because it addresses men as men – as gendered beings who participate in gender relations.

The impetus for male inclusion is fuelled in part by important shifts in particular fields of gender-related work. In the field of development for example, the overall shift from ‘women in development’ (WID) to ‘gender and development’ (GAD) ‘has embodied greater reference to men, and arguably created greater space for the inclusion of men as actors and clients in gender interventions’ (Chant and Guttman 2000: 6). This has intensified attention to men’s roles in two ways. First, GAD approaches are characterised in part by the goal of ‘gender mainstreaming’, in which gender issues are made an integral part of organisational thinking and practice. They aim to transform mainstream policy agendas from a gender perspective (rather than merely integrating gender into pre-existing policy concerns) and to re-work the cultures and functioning of development institutions (Chant and Guttman 2000: 2-10). This has provoked greater interest in addressing the attitudes and practices of men, whether as clients of development agencies or as policy-makers and practitioners. Second, GAD approaches embody a shift towards a more overt focus on gender relations and the aim of creating structural changes in male-female power relations. While they continue (ideally) to address women’s experiences and social situations, they also situate these in the context of the social and power relations between men and women. There are three broad areas in which men’s involvement may be enacted: (1) working with men as decision makers and service providers; (2) integrating men into the development process with a ‘gendered lens’; and (3) targeting groups of men and boys when and where they are vulnerable (for example in relation to issues of poverty or sexuality) (Lang 2003: 8-9).

Growing policy interest in men and gender issues also is fuelled by non-feminist, or even anti-feminist, motivations. These include the misguided perception that policies and programs have ‘focused on girls and women for too long and it is time to include men’, that ‘the pendulum has swung too far towards women and men are now the victims’, and even that ‘feminism has taken over and men must take back their rightful places at the head of the family and society’. Anti-feminist men’s rights and fathers’ rights groups are vocal advocates of such positions (Flood 1997), and they have had some influence in swaying the policy agendas of governments in the US, Australia, and elsewhere. More widely, governments may be sympathetic to simplistic notions of male disadvantage, especially as there are areas of social life such as health and secondary schooling in which some boys and men suffer. This makes it all the more necessary that we ensure that gender equality remains the guiding principle of any engagement in ‘men’s issues’. Governments certainly should address areas of male pain, but not at the expense of women.

Support and resistance

Men show both support for, and resistance to, gender equality. Including men in gender work ideally involves the recognition of this diversity, and the adoption of different strategies in responding to resistance while mobilising and building on support. Many men receive formal and informal benefits from gender inequalities, including material rewards and interpersonal power. At the same time, men also pay significant costs, particularly to their emotional and physical health. More widely, men can be and are motivated by interests other than those associated with gender privilege. There are important resources in men’s lives for the construction of gender-equitable masculinities and forms of selfhood, such as men’s concerns for children, intimacies with women, and ethical and political commitments. Thus, while men ought to change, it is also in men’s interests to change. There is a moral imperative that men give up their unjust share of power, and men themselves will benefit from advancing towards gender equality.

There are further reasons why efforts at gender reform should address men, to do with both the detrimental effects of male exclusion and the positive effects of male inclusion. First, the longstanding equation of ‘gender’ with women potentially marginalises women and women’s struggles (Kaufman 2003: 3). In the field of development for example, leaving men out of efforts towards gender equality can provoke male hostility and retaliation, arising out of both exclusion and more general anxieties among men (Chant and Guttman 2000: 25; Lang 2003: 9). Focusing only on women, in relation to such issues as economic participation, credit, or sexual and reproductive health, can leave women with yet more work to do and thus intensify gender inequalities. Women-only projects can mean that women still have to deal with unsympathetic men and patriarchal power relations, and can leave women with sole responsibility for sexual health, family nutrition, and so on (Chant and Guttman 2000: 26).

Including men in grassroots work on gender equality has important benefits. Given that many women already interact with men on a daily basis in their households and public lives, involving men can make interventions more relevant and workable (Chant and Guttman 2000: 26). Male inclusion increases men's responsibility for change. Explicitly addressing men can increase men's belief that they too will gain from gender equality and can engage men directly in the renegotiation of gender relations. Male inclusion can speak to many men's sense of anxiety and fear as 'traditional' masculinities are undermined. Men's suffering (such as men's growing burden of illness or social and economic marginalisation among young, poor men) is worth addressing in its own right, and in terms of its potential impact on women (Chant and Guttman 2000: 26-28).

None of this means that women's groups and gender-related programming must include men. There continue to be reasons why 'women's space', women-only and women-focused programs are vital: to support those who are most disadvantaged by pervasive gender inequalities; to maintain women's solidarity and leadership; and to foster women's consciousness-raising and collective empowerment. Nor should growing attention to male involvement threaten resources for women and women's programs. At the same time, reaching men to reduce gender inequalities against women is by definition spending money to meet the interests and needs of women, and will expand the financial and political support available to women's programs (Kaufman 2003: 11).

One small step

In reflecting on the need to incorporate men in gender-related work, it is worth remembering that a policy concern with women and with gender equality remains marginal or even non-existent in many countries. Even in countries where governments have adopted policies and institutional structures that are supportive of women, only rarely has gender equality been integrated into the depth and breadth of government policies and processes. The same goes for many local decision-making bodies, community organisations, and international agencies. In the field of development for example, there is little evidence that a concern with women, let alone with gender, has been integrated into programs and planning among development agencies, bureaucracies, funding agencies, or governments (Chant and Guttman 2000: 2,14). Despite three decades of effort, actual development work has continued to marginalise women and women's concerns. This also means that 'male-inclusive' gender initiatives are relatively undeveloped.

There are both good and bad reasons for the ongoing absence of men-as-men in gender policy and programming. Given the persistence of widespread gender inequalities which disadvantage women, and the limited availability of resources for gender-related work, there are good reasons for continuing to focus on women (Chant and Guttman 2000: 16-19). In the field of development for example, there are understandable fears as to what may happen if men are invited in, in the context of a history of grassroots examples where women have lost out, men have taken over, and women-oriented projects have been diluted or subverted (Chant and Guttman 2000: 19). Women may be hesitant to share a realm which has been historically a place of sanctuary for women (Lang 2003: 3). The patriarchal organisational structures and cultures of development organisations, and governments, inhibit attention to men's roles in gender equality (Lang 2003: 2-3). Women's sectors often are weak, marginalised, under-funded, and have had little impact on mainstream developmental policies, programs and processes (Chant and Guttman 2000: 21). In this context:

Men may feel threatened by women's challenge to male entitlements, they may feel that gender has nothing to do with them, they are less likely to recognise gender relations as unequal, or may avoid raising gender issues for fear of disapproval and ridicule (Chant and Guttman 2000: 21-22).

Men may also feel that as men they have been seen as 'all the same', and may resent approaches that are tactless or overly negative. Overall, as Chant and Guttman conclude (2000: 23), there might be more willingness to include men in gender-related work if women had been given an equal place and say in policy in general and if worldwide gender inequalities had lessened. Nevertheless, including men will be critical to the successful creation of gender equality.

Engaging men

How should men be included in gender-related work? The bottom line of course is that any incorporation of men and men's gendered issues into practice and policy should further the feminist goal of gender equality. There is the danger that in speaking to men's concerns, interests and problems, the impetus

for justice for women will be weakened and slide into anti-feminist backlash (Connell 2003: 10). Yet gender equality initiatives must include an engagement with men and masculinities if they are to be effective. Thus the rationale of gender equality must be kept central.

Beyond the overarching principle of gender equality, there are further elements to any effective and beneficial strategy of male inclusion. One is that funding for work with men and boys should not be at the expense of funding for gender equality work with women and girls (Expert Group 2003: 14). Another is that work with men should be done in partnership with women. Partnerships with women and women's groups enable men to learn from existing efforts and scholarship rather than 'reinventing the wheel'. They lessen the risk that men will collude in or be complicit with dominant and oppressive forms of masculinity. And they are a powerful and practical demonstration of men's and women's shared interest in democratic and peaceful gender relations. Another element is that rather than having separate and parallel policies for women and men, we should adopt integrated gender policies which address the relations between women and men (Expert Group 2003: 13).

Organisations and agencies themselves must also model gender equality, addressing their own policies, staff and organisational culture (Lang 2003: 1). This should include reflection by male staff on their own experience, privilege, and gendered practice. One detailed example of such a process comes from the United Nations Working Group on Men and Gender Equality. Formed in the late 1990s, this group involved both male and female staff from UN-based organisations in New York. The group invited men to reflect on the connections between gender equality and their personal and professional lives, using this as the springboard for broader organisational change. Lang (2003: 4-7) reports that the promotion of greater gender self-awareness can produce shifts in organisational culture and gender relations and encourage deeper partnerships among and between different groups of men and women.

Resources

This paper has said relatively little thus far about the actual strategies one should use in involving men. However, there is now a very substantial and useful range of resources with which to design and implement work with men and to encourage men's roles in promoting gender equality.

Frameworks

Practitioners and policy makers can make use of a rapidly growing literature offering frameworks with which to articulate the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. Three recent documents which do this are Connell's (2003) framework prepared for the Brazil meeting, Kaufman's (2003) 'AIM framework: Addressing and involving men and boys to promote gender equality and end gender discrimination and violence', and the Expert Group (2003) Report itself. Other important discussions of men's roles in progress towards gender equality are given by Lang (2002) and Greig, Kimmel, and Lang (2000). Pro-feminist men's writing and activism features on the Internet, for example in the articles, lists of websites, and other resources collected at XYonline (see <<http://www.xyonline.net>>). In more academic, feminist-informed writing on men and masculinities, there is a very substantial articulation of men's relation to feminism, exploring questions of epistemology and political practice, including recent texts by Digby (1998), Gardiner (2002) and Pease (2000; 2002).

Strategies

In terms of the practical strategies and policies that should be adopted to facilitate men's role in building gender equality, one of the most thorough overviews is the Expert Group Report (2003) prepared in Brazil. As well as offering general guidance for policy-makers and others, this addresses five key areas: (1) socialization and education, (2) workplace and economy, (3) sexuality, health, and HIV/AIDS, (4) family life, domestic work, and work/life balance, and (5) gender-based violence. The report offers recommendations for key actors, including governments, public sector organizations, the private sector, and civil society.

There are a number of fields in which there has been significant reflection on how best to work with men and to engage effectively with men. These include sexual and reproductive health and men's violence against women. The United Nations Population Fund (2000; 2003) has published substantial manuals on

male involvement in sexual and reproductive health. And the Internet offers an inspiring collection of manuals, guides, and discussions on violence prevention work among men.⁴ Experience in engaging men is also rapidly developing in the fields of men's health and fathering.

Conclusion

The impetus for men's involvement in gender-related work is likely to increase in the next few years. It is fuelled by ongoing shifts in gender relations, feminist and pro-feminist recognition of the need to transform and reconstruct masculinities, and trends in particular fields such as development work, as well as more troubling agendas such as non- and anti-feminist interest in 'correcting the balance' by focusing on men. There is no doubt that involving men in efforts towards gender equality has the potential to greatly enhance the impact and reach of this work. But whether or not it does so will depend on the play of political and cultural forces and relations. Still, building a world of gender justice will bring benefit to both women and men, and the reconstruction of gender will require our shared commitment and involvement.

Note

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Online resources on men's roles in building gender equality

- Articles on men, gender, and masculinity (100 or so accessible articles): <http://www.xyonline.net/articles.shtml>
- Web sites on men and gender, including on men's anti-violence work: <http://www.xyonline.net/links.shtml>
- The Men's Bibliography: A comprehensive bibliography of writing on men, masculinities, gender, and sexualities: <http://mensbiblio.xyonline.net/>

⁴ Discussions of violence prevention efforts among men, and examples of practice, can be found for example on the websites of the online discussion "Building Partnerships to End Men's Violence" (<http://endabuse.org/bpi/>), the VAWNet collection on "**Men in the Movement to End Violence Against Women: Campaigns and Campaign Materials**" (<http://www.vawnet.org/DomesticViolence/PreventionAndEducation/Campaigns/MenCampaigns.php>), and Brazil's Instituto Promundo (<http://www.promundo.org.br/english/vioprevpu.asp>). Discussions of educational strategies among boys and men can be found for example in the Australian "Rape Myth-Busters" program (http://www.shinesa.org.au/pdf/rape_myth_buster_manual_cards.pdf) and Jo Weinberg's "Teaching Sexual Ethics" page (<http://www.teachingsexualethics.org/home.htm>). A collection of men's anti-violence websites can be found on the XYonline website (<http://www.xyonline.net/links.shtml#2>).

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