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Focus-on integrating gender into the politics of development [Gender programme newsletter, September 1998]

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FOCUS



UNRISD No. 4, September 1998

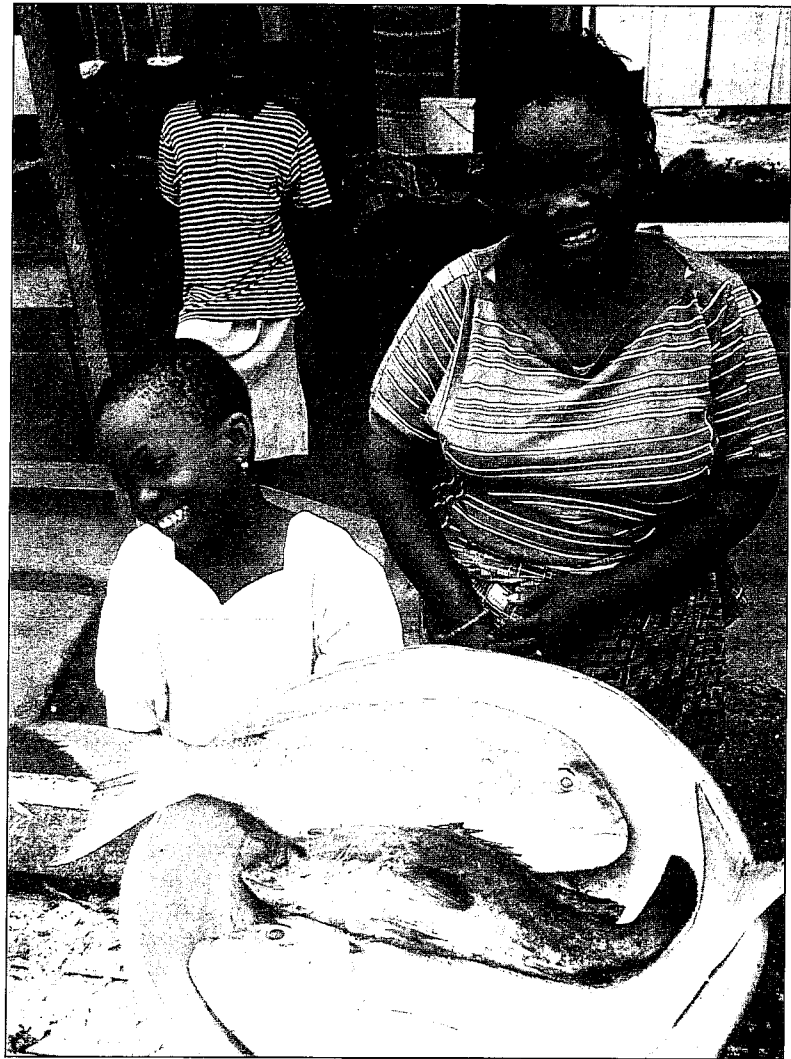
on integrating gender into the politics of development

Over the past year, the gender programme at UNRISD has concentrated on the launching of the new research project — *Gender, Poverty and Well-being* — introduced in the last issue of *FOCUS*. Research findings from the first major research project on gender issues — *Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives* — have been disseminated. A joint research project with the International Labour Organization, exploring the role of focal points within the organization in mainstreaming gender issues, has also been initiated.

In collaboration with UNDP and the Centre for Development Studies, a workshop — *Gender, Poverty and Well-being: Indicators and Strategies* — was held in November 1997 in Trivandrum, Kerala, to discuss the area of well-being indicators and current strategies for poverty alleviation from a gender perspective.

The workshop deliberations are described in this issue and summaries of the Discussion Papers to emerge thus far from the project can be found in the section on publications. In addition, an update is provided of thematic areas that are likely to shape the design of country level research, the aim of which is to address critical dimensions of the gender/poverty interface that remain insufficiently explored. Further debate on the project's initial findings will take place at a workshop hosted by the Research Council of Norway and the Royal Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, scheduled for late September 1998 in Oslo.

Since September 1997 there has been a flourish of publications on gender issues at the Institute, summaries of which appear in this issue. Before turning to those pages, we would like to draw our readers' attention to the new publications strategy described on the following page. ■



Cooking fish fresh from the sea (Oshie Village, Ghana)

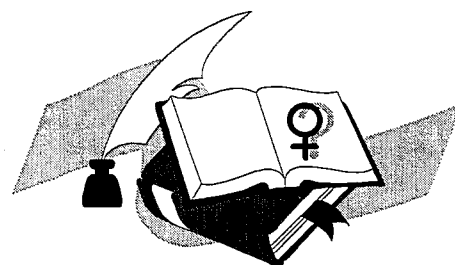
JORGEN SCHYTE / STILL PICTURES

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Separate or Integrate?

Rethinking UNRISD gender publications



UNRISD is currently taking stock of its publication and dissemination programme, identifying areas that can be strengthened and new ways to reach the Institute's diverse constituents more effectively. In this context there has been discussion of the merits of project-specific publications, including newsletters and other series, relative to the Institute-wide *UNRISD News* and Discussion Papers. The debate has pertained quite directly to the gender programme, which since 1995 has published its own newsletter (*FOCUS*) and Occasional Papers.

In the run-up to the Social Summit (Copenhagen, March 1995), UNRISD published Occasional Papers and Briefing Papers, which attracted wide interest. This was taken as a precedent by the gender programme in its preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995), prior to which five UNRISD/UNDP Occasional Papers (OPs) on gender were

published. It is our impression that the OP series has been effective in reaching readers interested in UNRISD work on gender issues — an area in which, prior to 1995, UNRISD had done little sustained work. A total of 10 titles have been published in the series. The annual preparation of *FOCUS* has been a useful stock-taking exercise for the staff of the gender programme, encouraging us to synthesize research findings and to reflect on our progress.

Now that the work of the gender programme is more widely recognized, however, we will begin to integrate its publications into the Institute-wide series. We have weighed the arguments on both sides — those for producing separate, clearly differentiated products and those for integration — and we hope our readers will agree that synergies between work on gender and other areas of the Institute's research should be fostered wherever possible.

From now on, substantive research results and studies will be published as Discussion Papers, with a clear indication that they have come out of the gender

programme. We will benefit in other ways as well: from this point forward, all Discussion Papers will contain summaries in English, French and Spanish; and especially popular papers will quickly be made available on UNRISD ON-LINE.

We are also considering whether publication of *FOCUS* should continue. An alternative way to keep our readers informed of gender programme information is through *UNRISD News*, which is published twice a year, simultaneously in print and on the Institute's Web site, UNRISD ON-LINE, in English, French and Spanish. *UNRISD News* contains a variety of information about the Institute's multidisciplinary research programme and publications, commissioned articles and think-pieces, as well as a bulletin-board section on social development information from around the globe. This option would help ensure that UNRISD work on gender issues reaches a wider audience.

In the months to come UNRISD will continue working on its publication and dissemination strategy, and your feedback would be most appreciated. ■

Gender, Poverty and Well-being

In the last issue of *FOCUS* (No.3), which was printed just before the Trivandrum workshop (24-27 November 1997), we reported on the launching of a new research project at UNRISD, entitled *Gender, Poverty and Well-being*. Now, one year on, this issue reports on some of the publications emerging from this project (see pp. 12-18), as well as the deliberations at the Trivandrum workshop (pp. 5-6). It is argued here that women experience poverty differently from men, and if interventions to alleviate poverty are to be responsive to the needs and priorities of poor women, then gender-differentiated poverty trajectories need to be better understood and clearly reflected in poverty-alleviation policies.

It is not a coincidence that one of the conspicuous themes running through the first phase of the project on *Gender, Poverty and Well-being* was on social indicators. Evidence from population censuses, initially in India but later elsewhere in South and East Asia, has long drawn attention to the unfavourable life chances of females versus males in this part of the world. The "missing females" phenomenon, as Amartya Sen aptly called it, came to symbolize in quite dramatic

terms the inadequacy of household-based measures of poverty in revealing intra-household inequalities in access to vital resources and well-being. It also became, for some at least, an easy way of thinking about the gender dimensions of poverty. Over time, there developed an orthodoxy around social indicators and gender that implicitly assumed universal female disadvantage in food consumption, nutritional status and life chances.

However the contradictory findings that were emerging from some of the fine-grained empirical studies on well-being outcomes, showed incredible diversity not just across different regions, countries and localities, but also across social class and over the life cycles of men and women. The papers commissioned by UNRISD draw on this body of empirical research to emphasize the problematic nature of sweeping generalizations about female disadvantage; even in north and north-western India, for example, where the evidence on discrimination against young girls in terms of survivorship is most compelling, findings from nutritional surveys often show that adult women fare better than their male counterparts, and there is a distinct possibility that in some contexts, especially among poorer households, this may be due to the effort intensity of

men's work (in ploughing and digging, for example). The papers also draw attention to the intractable data problems in the area of social indicators and the difficulties involved in making meaningful comparisons between male and female well-being when women's and men's bodies are so different in form and function.

A further insight emerging from these papers, however, is that evidence on poverty outcomes (and gender differences therein) cannot disclose all that there is to know about the processes and social mechanisms leading to poverty, and therefore leaves some important analytical and policy questions unaddressed. Gender analysis of poverty, it is argued, is not so much about whether women suffer more from poverty than men (in numbers or intensity), but rather about *how* gender differentiates the social processes leading to poverty, and the escape routes out of destitution. If women do indeed experience poverty differently from men, i.e. through different social mechanisms, then this would also mean that the kinds of policies and asset interventions designed to strengthen the position of poor men may not have the same impact on poor women.

Do women, for example, relate to land in the same way as

men? Evidence from micro-level research in South Africa, where women are being explicitly targeted as potential beneficiaries of the land reform programme, suggests that women relate to land in gender-specific ways. They are more interested in land as a major household resource in supplying wood, water and thatching grass, as well as being more interested than

The feminist literature on this subject is far from monolithic, suggesting important differences in modes of domination and resistance, which reflect differences not only in workers' employment histories and managerial strategies, but also in kinship and familial relations within which these industries have inserted themselves. But it is arguable that neither the neo-

women engage with the formal labour market more intermittently than men, while they shift to other forms of work that are more compatible with their reproductive responsibilities during certain periods of their life. How can such work experiences be recognized and accredited? Similarly, some form of child care support may be much more important for them than



Father carrying daughter in a basket (Bhaktapur, Nepal)

HARINIE SCHWARBACH / STILL PICTURES

having a minimum wage. As Diane Elson argues, most women have never enjoyed and *may not even aspire* to male norms of full-time, permanent life-long jobs (a 40-50 hour week, from 8 or 9 till 5), based on carefully demarcated craft skills. And the key issue is not so much the disintegration of previous norms of "regular" employment, which were in any case always more applicable to men than to women. Rather the important question is about how women and men can secure decent livelihoods to support themselves and their dependants. What forms of organizing and what visions of social policy

can facilitate women's engagement with the labour market on their own terms?

men in land for residential purposes. In any case, farming does not seem to define their interests in land. The distinctiveness of women's engagement with the labour market also needs to be appreciated in the context of the current policy enthusiasm for "labour-intensive growth" as the route out of poverty. Women have, for example, been integrated into export-oriented manufacturing industries in significant numbers, even though this has been geographically patchy as well as being highly volatile.

classical advocates nor institutionalists have dealt with the distinctiveness of women's labour market engagement in a satisfactory manner.

An emphasis on labour market regulation is important for achieving gender equality, but its impact on working women will critically depend on the extent to which regulations can accommodate differences in women's and men's employment trajectories, and gendered differences in needs and priorities. It should be recognized, for example, that

The project is now entering the phase of comparative country level research, which requires careful identification of research questions and case studies in order to address some of the critical dimensions of the gender/poverty interface that remain insufficiently analysed and poorly understood. These will be reported on in the forthcoming issues of *UNRISD News*. ■

Gender, Poverty and Well-being: Indicators and Strategies

24-27 November 1997, Trivandrum, Kerala

***Gender, Poverty and Well-being* seeks to provide an empirically grounded basis for understanding the gender-differentiated social processes leading to poverty. The project's first international workshop was held in Trivandrum, last November, in collaboration with the Centre for Development Studies (Trivandrum) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).**

The workshop took place in a political and ideological climate apparently more conducive to the consideration of issues of poverty and social justice than it was a decade ago. At that time, the international financial institutions justified deepening poverty and social polarization in countries undergoing adjustment as a painful but unavoidable by-product of the transition to a market-driven economic régime. This is something they are no longer prepared to do; and their renewed commitment to poverty reduction creates new opportunities for raising concerns about gender inequity and discrimination. Nevertheless, the New Poverty

Agenda (NPA) put forward by mainstream development institutions also contains worrisome ambiguities.

Some of these were highlighted by the keynote speaker, Gita Sen, who underlined the ideological continuities between the neo-liberal project of the 1980s and the recent "consensus" around poverty. For example, redistributive measures involving direct state intervention continue to be sidelined by the architects of the NPA as "failed experiments", while policy options that rely on the private sector and NGOs become panaceas for poverty eradication. Similarly, it is unclear whether the NPA's accent on "labour-intensive growth" is different from what is already under way: production for export markets using casual, flexible labour, which in many developing countries has given rise to the Dickensian phenomenon of "the working poor".

Most of the workshop discussions focused on specific interconnections between gender and poverty. One controversial issue was the "perverse" relationship

between capital accumulation and opulence, on the one hand, and gender discrimination, on the other. For example, micro-level research in southern India has documented the emergence of a process of discrimination against females that accompanies certain patterns of capital accumulation. This raises some interesting questions about the interlinkages between class differentiation, property ownership and gender bias, and the social processes that may be responsible for discrimination against young girls.

Another set of questions emerges from countries/regions with impressive human development records marked by significant gender equity, such as Cuba and Kerala. For example, to what extent and in what ways do social policies intended to enhance women's health and education contribute to wider processes of empowerment? Responses to this question might reveal the interlinkages — or lack thereof — between conventional indicators of well-being and the more complex issues of autonomy and

empowerment, which entail considerable negotiation and struggle both within the household and outside it.

A third issue addressed at the workshop was how to improve the livelihood options of poor women. Under

this heading, special attention was given to micro credit and to land reform programmes. In both cases the limited conclusions reached by the participants were quite controversial. First, discussions brought out the so-called "irony of credit": micro-credit may not in fact provide the most appropriate livelihood support for women who are poor (as opposed to better-off

women). This is because the effective use of micro-credit requires the possession of complementary resources — land, skills, capital — assets that many poor women lack. At the same time, the weekly repayment schedules of some micro-credit programmes generate a high level of stress for borrowers, as well as tensions between women borrowers and their husbands (who often use the loans).

Second, participants noted the complex implications of land reform for women. Gaining title to land may in some contexts enhance women's security and bargaining power vis-à-vis husbands and other kin.

women the most viable route out of poverty and subordination is likely to be through more and better jobs. This in turn raises questions about labour market institutions and the extent to which they



Participants at the Trivandrum workshop (24-27 November 1997)

However, given the diversification away from agriculture and the extent to which agricultural markets and services remain male-dominated, some women may not see it as being in their interest to struggle for personal titles to land, and others who do prioritize land ownership may not want the land for farming purposes.

In other words, for significant numbers of poor and assetless

are, or can be made, gender-equitable in the context of an increasingly globalized economy.

Finally, the workshop provided a valuable opportunity for consideration of research themes that may be taken up in the future by the UNRISD gender programme. A complete report on the workshop discussions is being prepared and will be published in 1998. ■

The role of gender focal points in gender mainstreaming: A case study of the ILO

In 1997 ECOSOC recommended mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes of the United Nations system. This prompted the Special Adviser for Women Workers' Questions — responsible for gender mainstreaming within the International Labour Organization (ILO) — to look carefully at the gender focal point system. Set up in 1989 in all headquarters departments and the field structure, the gender focal point system supports efforts to mainstream gender concerns in ILO activities — ranging from standard setting and technical co-operation to research and policy advice. As part of this review process, a joint applied research project has been elaborated by UNRISD and ILO involving desk reviews, questionnaires and in-depth interviews with ILO gender focal points and other staff and social partners.

The research aims to contribute to current thinking about the strategy of gender mainstreaming and the kind of institutional and policy changes that might best support its implementation. Regarding *institutional arrangements* the research will develop a profile of the gender focal points, their selection process, their structural location and linkages to the Special Adviser's office

(FEMMES) and other gender focal points, their familiarity with organization-wide gender policy and guidelines, and their responsibilities and functions (e.g. programmatic, research, policy development, human resources), with particular attention to how far these are accurately reflected in their job descriptions. In many cases, the institutional arrangements, including criteria for selection and designation of functions, appear to be mainly *ad hoc*, raising questions about how far appropriate mechanisms have been established to support gender mainstreaming.

As for *implementation*, the research aims to go beyond a static profile of the gender focal point system. Interviews with gender focal points and other key staff members will explore in some detail the actual processes through which gender mainstreaming takes place (or fails to occur). Recent research in other institutional contexts suggests that there may have been too much emphasis in the past on structures/guidelines as determining variables in policy formulation and implementation, and not enough attention to the ways in which individual actors shape the content of policy at every level. Gender focal points actively shape gender policies through their interpretations of policy goals and directives, the way they prioritize these goals and directives in the context of their day-to-day activities, and their ongoing negotiations with

various actors both within the bureaucracy (superiors, colleagues, gender units) and beyond (donors, NGOs, social partners, gender networks).

The research will look at how gender politics plays itself out in the workplace. Gender issues tend to encounter resistance from individuals within the policy-making (and implementation) establishment because they touch on the persona of the male (and female) bureaucrat. Thus gender equity as a human resources issue (equal opportunities within bureaucracies) may frequently be confused with gender as a substantive issue for development policy. The distinction between the two issues is very often blurred, and it is critical for the present analysis to find out why this happens (who blurs the distinction and why?).

At the same time, the research will grant significant attention to the institutional challenges posed by the strategy of mainstreaming gender (and indeed any other issue) in organizations that tend to be hierarchical and highly departmentalized. This raises important questions about the feasibility of mainstreaming, which assumes horizontal and generally collaborative institutional structures, and about the kinds of institutional arrangements that are needed to support gender focal points and the goal of gender mainstreaming. ■

At first, Thais were shocked by news of the debacle in the financial sector, which effectively pulled their country out of the celebrated list of miracle economies. Soon after, they were numbed by the avalanche of hard, cold statistics on balance of payments, foreign reserves, national debts, stock market indices and currency values. No matter how devastating those statistics were, they appeared rather remote from everyday life. It was not until the crisis spread from the financial to the real economic sector — closing down one factory after another, putting millions of workers out of the labour market and tens of thousands of children out of schools — that Thais were forced into a process of soul searching about their approach to economic and social development.

In the past, economic expansion was considered to be enough to bring about social and human development. Overall indicators — such as the steadily declining poverty incidence, high participation of women in the workforce, low maternal mortality, high access to education — seemed to confirm that belief. Recent trends have led to fears that the crisis could wipe out gains that women have made.

Women have long been the backbone of the Thai economy both on the farm and in the factory. Globalization and the

No more miracle

Pawadee
Tonguthai



accompanying intense competition brought even more women into the labour market. However, the quality of their lives had been deteriorating, as wages were kept down and work safety ignored in the interest of cutting costs. Little attention was paid to upgrading product quality and improving workers' productivity through training that would guarantee dynamic competitiveness.

Then came the crash of 1997 and the subsequent bailout by the IMF. Worrying trends are emerging about the impact of the crisis on women as workers and as household managers. First, as firms suffering from cash flow problems start laying off workers, women — being

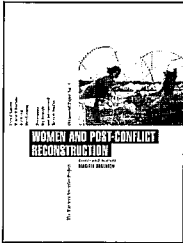
less educated and less skilled than men — are the first to go; second, as women are more likely than men to be hired on a temporary basis or to participate in the workforce only intermittently due to their family obligations, they receive less severance pay, which is directly linked to length of employment; third, for reasons similar to those that make women more vulnerable to lay offs, they find it more difficult than men to obtain new jobs or training opportunities; fourth, being responsible for household finance and expenditures, women bear the brunt of the burden from rising prices of food items. The need to adjust the budget often means women's own consumption is cut first to maintain that of the rest of the household.

During the golden years of the economic "bubble", when the country was growing at or near double digit rate, people seemed mesmerized by the "miracle". The widening gap between the rich and the poor was masked by the declining poverty incidence. Gender discrimination was overlooked as the number of jobs for women kept rising. In responding to the crisis, however, the government has an opportunity to implement long delayed economic and social reforms.

Dr. Pawadee Tonguthai is an economics professor at Thammasat University in Bangkok and is the co-ordinator of the UNDP/UNIFEM Gender Mainstreaming Facility for Thailand. ■

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources

Birgitte Sørensen



Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction is a review of literature dealing with political, economic and social reconstruction from a gender perspective. The paper documents the many different ways in which women make a contribution to the rebuilding of countries emerging from armed conflicts. Special attention is given to women's priority concerns, to their resources and capacities, and to structural and situational factors that may reduce their participation in reconstruction processes. The paper also sheds light on how post-war reconstruction processes influence the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions in the wake of war, and how women's actions shape the construction of post-war social structures.

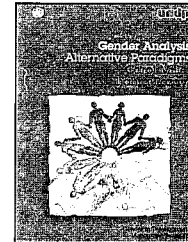
It is argued that our understanding of women's roles in post-war societies and of their contributions to post-war reconstruction must go beyond the universalistic narrative of "women's experience of war". The specificity and diversity of women's experiences must be acknowledged. Only on this basis can we conduct comparative analyses and begin to develop a deeper general understanding of post-war reconstruction from a gender perspective. Another point emerging from the paper is the importance of locating women's situation within a gender framework that pays attention to how gender roles and relationships are continuously constructed and contested by different actors, and recognizes the gender dimension inherent in all aspects of post-war construction. As the analysis strongly suggests, the failure to recognize gender issues may produce new social tensions and contribute to the differentiating struggles over identity, status and power that are so distinctive of societies that have recently achieved peace.

Formerly a researcher with the War-torn Societies Project, UNRISD, Birgitte Sørensen is currently attached to International Development Studies, Roskilde University Center.

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction (Occasional Paper No.3, War-torn Societies Project) is available from UNRISD (free of charge). ■

Gender Analysis: Alternative Paradigms

Carol Miller and
Shahra Razavi



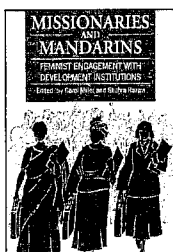
Gender analysis, once confined to the margins of development theory, has over the last 10 years penetrated both the thinking and the operations of international development institutions, transforming not only the practice but the objectives of development planning and programmes. Over this period, gender analysis has grown and developed; it is no longer a single perspective, but several. This study reviews the growing body of work on gender analysis, including recent approaches, explicating their main lines of convergence and difference, and assessing the results of their incorporation into training packages and programmes.

The principal conceptual paradigms that have framed gender analysis over the past decade include the Gender Roles Framework (GRF); the University College-London Department of Planning Unit (DPU) Framework ("triple roles model"); the Social Relations Framework developed by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex; and the approaches of feminist economics, including both neo-classical and critical feminist economics. These approaches differ in terms of their conceptualization of gender, scope of institutional analysis, implications for development, and issues of social and organizational change.

Several themes emerge from this review. First, the institutional focus of gender training frameworks has widened over time — from the household to other institutions through which gender inequality is reproduced. Second, the type of development interventions the frameworks target has moved from the project level to sectoral and macro-economic policies. Third, there is an ongoing tension between so-called "integrationist" and "agenda-setting" approaches to development and how the training frameworks implicitly or explicitly embrace one or the other of these. Finally, the extent to which the frameworks view development institutions themselves as "gendered" has changed over time, raising issues of organizational change for each of them.

Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi are Project Leaders at UNRISD. The paper was published by UNDP.

Individual copies of Gender Analysis (UNDP Gender in Development Monograph series No. 6) are available from the UNDP Gender in Development Programme, One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA; e-mail: gidp@undp.org. Also available on the Internet: <http://www.undp.org/undp/gender>. ■



Missionaries and Mandarins: Feminist Engagement with Development Institutions

Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi (eds.)

This book examines the various strategies of engagement employed by women working to transform the bureaucratic structures of state organizations, multilateral institutions and NGOs to make them more gender-equitable. These strategies often combine the task of pursuing transformative agendas from within bureaucracies — of being “missionaries” — while adapting to the techniques and practices of the bureaucracy as a “mandarin” would have to do.

The contributors examine struggles not only at the discursive level, where women’s needs are constructed and contested, but also at the institutional level of the rules and procedures of bureaucratic actors, and at the level of resource

allocation. Studies from many different countries, including Australia, Canada, Morocco and Viet Nam, illustrate both the variety of institutional strategies adopted by feminists in different political and cultural settings, and the highly diverse forms of political action by women that can be seen to constitute feminist politics. From their different perspectives the contributors acknowledge the gendered nature of bureaucracies but argue against the view that these institutions are monolithic and impermeable.

Missionaries and Mandarins has much to say to all those feminists working within bureaucracies — whether state or civil society institutions — with the aim of

promoting women’s concerns; it will also interest those who have chosen a strategy of “disengagement”. In addition, the book makes a significant contribution to recent developments in the anthropological study of organizations.

Edited by Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi, Project Leaders at UNRISD.

Co-published by UNRISD and Intermediate Technology Publications (September 1998, ISBN 1-8533-9434, paperback, 240 pages, £16.95). Order from Intermediate Technology Publications, 103/105 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HH, United Kingdom. ■

The Women’s Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco (OPB 8)

Rabéa Naciri



In Morocco, as in many other countries, the claims of the women’s movement have not figured prominently in conventional political debates. Traditional political actors have long used the pretext of religious and cultural sensitivity to keep women’s issues off the political agenda, and to limit women’s visibility and impact on public life. But this situation is changing under the impact of two contradictory processes: democratization and the resurgence of political Islam. Maintaining state legitimacy now depends on placating conservative Islamist interests, while at the same time projecting a progressive image towards the outside world. The contemporary women’s movement has exploited the possibilities for

action in both modern and traditional spheres.

This paper traces the development of the movement, concentrating in particular on associations emerging in the mid-1980s. While asserting their independence, these associations have sought a rapprochement with the most progressive parties as a way to influence the political agenda. Interestingly, many women have also been able to use Islam as a “strategy of resistance” to strengthen their position.

The author concludes that the visibility and energy of the women’s movement have made it a defining element in the structure of contemporary civil society in Morocco. Despite claims to eschew

conventional “politics”, the women’s movement has nonetheless helped to shift “political” boundaries by encouraging public discussion and debate on issues traditionally associated with the domestic and private spheres. In so doing, it has increased political participation and broadened the political terrain in Morocco.

Rabéa Naciri, of the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines at the University of Rabat, co-ordinated country level research in Morocco for the UNRISD project *Technical Co-operation and Women’s Lives*.

Order from UNRISD (\$5 for readers in the North, \$2.50 for readers in the South). ■

Becoming a Garments Worker: The Mobilization of Women into the Garments Factories of Bangladesh (OPB 9)

Nazli Kibria



Since the early 1980s an export-oriented garments industry has mushroomed in Bangladesh, with women workers constituting a significant proportion of its wage labour force. In explaining the reasons for this development, considerable attention has been paid to the motivations of employers. The latter prefer to hire young women because of their lower cost, and because they are assumed to be more "docile" and "nimble" in their work than men.

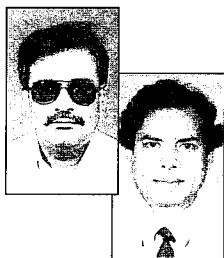
Nevertheless, it is equally important to understand the reasons why women enter the wage labour force. The conventional explanation is that both extreme poverty and the

related phenomena of male unemployment and desertion force women to become garments workers. In her study, however, Nazli Kibria describes a more complex picture. Interviews with women factory workers in Dhaka suggest that their decisions, which often entail migration from the countryside to the capital, may be prompted by family conflicts, problems of sexual harassment, uncertain marriage prospects and the pressures arising from increasing dowry demands. Factory work may also seem preferable to the other livelihood options that are open to some women, such as domestic service and arduous forms of agricultural

wage work. But the socio-economic background of garments workers is diverse. In some instances garments work improves personal and/or household economic prospects, while in other cases it provides a measure of economic and social independence for the women concerned.

Nazli Kibria is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Boston University. The paper is based on research undertaken in Bangladesh as part of the *Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives* project.

Order from UNRISD (\$5 for readers in the North, \$2.50 for readers in the South). ■



Female Employment under Export-Propelled Industrialization: Prospects for Internalizing Global Opportunities in Bangladesh's Apparel Sector (OPB 10 - forthcoming)

Debapriya Bhattacharya and Mustafizur Rahman

Large-scale entry of women into the labour market has been one of the most striking features of recent industrialization in Bangladesh. Supply of cheap and flexible female labour has provided the country with a competitive edge on which the success of its flagship export-oriented industry — the ready-made garments (RMG) sector — is built.

Evidence shows that the female labour that entered the industrial labour force in Bangladesh is concentrated mainly in the "low skill/low wage" segment of the production process. The ongoing globalization of the textiles market, under the Uruguay Round provisions, will increasingly test the limit of such low skill-intensive export-oriented manufacturing activities in

developing countries such as Bangladesh. Concomitantly, the phasing-out of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) provides Bangladesh with a unique opportunity to capitalize on the expanding market access by restructuring its domestic apparel sector through introduction of new technologies and the setting up of backward linkages.

However, if female workers continue to remain locked in the low skill/low wage segment of the apparel production cycle, it is highly unlikely that these changes will usher in sustained growth of the country's RMG sector and, consequently, enhanced income for the female workers. Thus, the paper argues for a market-responsive public policy

package aimed at raising the productivity level of female workers. Such interventions would need to embody women-oriented social sector allocations and must be supported by a conscious effort to encourage the private sector to provide training to the female labour force in order to raise their productivity and stimulate their engagement in the export linkage activities in the apparel sector.

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Gendered Poverty and Social Change: An Issues Paper (DP 94)

Shahra Razavi

This paper argues that the interlinkages between gender and poverty have, until recently, escaped careful analytical scrutiny. At one level, the relationship between gender disadvantage and poverty appears to be quite straightforward: women (or female-headed households), it is very often argued, suffer more from poverty than men (or male-headed households) in numbers and/or in intensity. This particular approach has been prominent in aid agency writings on "gender and poverty", which have used social and/or economic indicators to capture poverty outcomes. An exclusive focus on poverty outcomes, however, very often means that the processes leading to poverty are either overlooked or otherwise analysed through regressions or correlations of a few variables abstracted from a far more complex scenario wherein a wide range of institutions interact. It also, inevitably, means that gender will be dealt with through a process of disaggregation — either of households, using the gender of the "household head" as the stratifier, or of individuals, differentiating males and females — that is analytically limited. Moreover, sweeping generalizations about female disadvantage (in mortality, nutrition, education) need to be revised in view of the contradictory findings



emerging from detailed studies of gender bias in well-being outcomes. This literature documents considerable diversity in relative female well-being, not just across different regions, countries and localities, but also across social class, and over the life cycles of men and women.

A somewhat different understanding of the gender/poverty interface is therefore adopted and developed, drawing on some of the existing gender and development writings on the subject, as well as on a number of papers commissioned by UNRISD. This understanding begins from the position that the gender analysis of poverty needs to unravel how gender differentiates the social mechanisms leading to poverty. An understanding of these causal processes has significant policy implications: it raises important questions about whether it can be assumed, as is often done, that the kinds of policies and asset interventions that can strengthen the position

of poor men are going to have much the same impact on poor women.

Methodologically, the paper highlights some of the potential strengths of both the "capability" framework and "participatory" approaches in capturing gender bias. But it also notes: (a) the intractable data problems in the area of social indicators (on which the capability framework relies), as well as the difficulties involved in making meaningful comparisons between male and female well-being when men's and women's bodies are so different in form and function; and (b) that while the potential is there for non-survey, participatory techniques to produce dynamic accounts of gendered poverty, whether this potential is realized in practice largely depends on how they are used. It suggests that, despite the serious data deficiencies and methodological difficulties involved in using household-based measures of income or consumption to arrive at

individual levels of well-being, some understanding of household (and preferably individual) opulence may be useful. This is particularly the case when analysing the gender dimensions of poverty, given the complex (and contextually varied) ways in which opulence/poverty (along with many other factors) impact on women's livelihood strategies and the degree of autonomy they enjoy within familial and conjugal spheres. It is also argued that the "entitlements" framework may prove useful in focusing poverty analyses on the social forces and institutions implicated in the creation and perpetuation of poverty — after relaxing its excessively legalistic view of the rules of entitlement. This revision would provide some analytical space for considering individual and collective attempts to subvert, bypass or ignore the rules and norms that entitle people differently and unequally — an actor orientation that is very often missing from structuralist accounts of poverty.

Two critical components of the current agendas for poverty alleviation — land rights/tenure security and "labour-intensive growth" — are explored from the point of view of gendered poverty trajectories. The issue of land rights for women has figured prominently on both donor and feminist agendas. But policies in this area need to be wary of a number of issues: (a) not only are there stark differences in how women in different regions relate to land, but there are also critical gender differences in how men and women in the same locality relate to land, with women's ability to function as fully acting subjects in relation to property being less than that of men, and mediated through their relationships with men; (b) given local power structures, the pursuit of tenure security can in

practice end up entrenching existing inequalities in access to land by formalizing informal rights and registering them in the names of household heads (and richer and well-connected ones at that), unless poorer women can be organized effectively to engage with and make use of the formal structures and legal opportunities that are put in place; (c) even where women's provisioning roles, as well as their engagement in production for the market, are socially recognized, as in sub-Saharan Africa, land tends to be valued as a resource in gender-specific

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ways and farming does not always define women's interest in land; and (d) while for some women in sub-Saharan Africa discriminatory inheritance laws and poor land access are significant constraints, only in a minority of cases is inadequate access to land because of an inability to secure usufruct rights by itself a cause of poverty.

The current policy consensus on poverty, which vehemently maintains that labour-intensive growth is pro-poor, presents a number of serious problems — both from a poverty perspective and, particularly, from the point of view of poor women. First, labour saving technologies that reduce drudgery can be

valuable for both men and, especially, women in smallholder households, who strive to reduce the effort-intensity of their work, and also given the important interlinkages between the physical burden of work and well-being. The policy obsession with extracting work from the poor, which is being validated through the New Poverty Agenda, thus needs to be viewed with concern since it may not provide much of an escape from poverty. The emphasis on agriculture as the sector that can produce labour-intensive growth in sub-Saharan Africa is also open to question, given the increasing importance for the rural poor of "straddling" different economic options when the returns to farming are so pitiful. In fact, food security considerations very often push farmers into casual labouring on a daily basis, which effectively diverts their labour from their own production and becomes an important part of the dynamic of impoverishment. This is not meant to endorse the global policy prescriptions for the agricultural sector, which condemn in advance any attempt by the public sector to intervene in agricultural markets through protective tariffs, quotas and subsidies. Nor is it meant to suggest that the off-farm sector, or the urban labour market, can be a panacea for poor women. The social and poverty implications of women's entry into the manufacturing labour force have been highly context-specific, opening up a Pandora's box of diversity in modes of domination and resistance.

Shahra Razavi is Project Leader of the *Gender, Poverty and Well-being* project at UNRISD.

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Gender Sensitivity of Well-being Indicators (DP 95)

Ruhi Saith and
Barbara Harriss-White

In this paper the gender sensitivity of indicators of health, nutrition and education, and some composite indices, is critically examined with reference to developing countries. Their relationship with poverty is also explored.



Indicators of health — Indicators of differential mortality and morbidity are assessed. Indicators of mortality are easily measurable and economically affordable relative to other social indicators. The reliability of some (such as life expectancy) that can mask gender differentials in specific age groups is, however, questionable. Among the age-specific indicators, juvenile sex ratios (particularly disaggregated into the Female Male Ratio 0-4 and 5-9 years) appear to be of greatest use in revealing bias. This has been assessed for India and is worthy of investigation in other developing countries. With respect to morbidity, constructing indicators is problematic due to the inherent unreliability of the data.

Indicators of nutrition — Indicators are assessed in two groups: those of intake and those of outcome — both found wanting. Estimation of food intake is time consuming, expensive, intrusive and prone to error. Fixing the per caput

requirement norm is dependent on "typical" energy requirements, body size and physical activity. With regard to outcome indicators, too, the use of the same norm for anthropometric measurements across populations is debatable.

Indicators of education — Indicators are assessed in two groups: indicators of access (which include stock variables, such as adult literacy and flow such as enrolment, repetition and drop-out ratios) and indicators of content and purpose. In developing countries with a larger proportion of younger age groups, flow access variables provide more up-to-date information than stock access variables. Indicators of content and purpose may be useful to assess gender differences in the field of education, especially (but not only) when access is universal.

Composite indicators — Although a multidimensional approach to evaluation has many merits, the current trend to

compress multiple functionings into composite indices (e.g., the Gender-related Development Index — GDI) raises other issues. Value judgements have to be made about the components to be included (based on the intended use of the index) and excluded, and the weights to be allotted.

The relationship between household poverty and gender differences — The limited evidence suggests that gender differentials in well-being outcomes do not necessarily conflate with differences in opulence. Except for the gender gap in education, it is not evident that gender inequality is universally higher among lower income groups.

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Work Intensity, Gender and Well-being (DP 96)

Cecile Jackson
and Richard Palmer-Jones

Employment is central to current understandings of poverty and well-being, as well as to prescriptions for poverty reduction. Labour-intensive growth and greater labour force participation by women are major policy

recommendations in the New Poverty Agenda of the 1990s. They are also prominent elements in the discourse on Women in Development. But gender analysts paint a complex picture of women and work. They note that women often face social and ideological constraints when seeking, obtaining and performing work outside households, with responsibilities for child bearing and rearing generating particular problems. And the objective of increasing female employment can — in the context of long working days and added household duties — contribute to what has been termed "time famine", with negative effects on women's health and well-being. Finally, it is important to analyse the specific content and character of work — and especially its physical arduousness.

The Character of Work

The development discourse in general, and poverty and



gender debates in particular, often treat "labour" more as an abstract category than as a physical experience. This means that there is very little useful literature on work intensity, let alone on gender-specific work intensities. Yet

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an analysis of varying levels of energy expended in carrying out different forms of work, as this is related to individual physical strength, shows that women and men have different capacities for physical effort at different

stages in their life cycles. Both biological differences and socio-cultural norms are significant in this regard. The concept of the arduousness of labour, which is determined not only by work intensity but also by other psycho-social characteristics of work, is an essential tool for understanding levels of nutrition, health and other central components of well-being (or ill-being), including productivity.

Work Intensity and Poverty Eradication

A focus on the issue of work intensity raises new questions about poverty eradication programmes. In fact, many of the policies espoused by the development community, and often assumed to reduce poverty, may worsen the conditions of the poor. Several examples of how this may occur are outlined below.

Agricultural extensification — increasing the size of a household agricultural plot —

may be essential for improving the livelihood of those with below subsistence holdings. But it often increases the workload of women, who are likely in many farming systems to provide the bulk of the labour required to cultivate larger areas of land. This can have a negative effect on women's well-being and, as was recently shown in Zimbabwe, can also have ill effects on child nutrition and overall household well-being.

Effort-intensive growth policies — routes out of poverty through labour-intensive economic growth — generally fail to take individual capabilities for work into account and may thus have negative effects on well-being. It can also be

Environment-friendly and "sustainable" technologies ... can impose severe health risks on the weaker members of the household — women in particular — who assume the main burden of work.

asked why, when people throughout the world attempt to improve well-being through avoiding heavy physical labour, poverty alleviation strategies do not concentrate

more systematically on generating acceptable returns for lower levels of human energy expenditure.

Uncritical support for *environment-friendly and "sustainable" technologies* should also be reviewed. Technologies that substitute human energy for fossil fuel-based production systems are often considered suitable for poor countries with abundant supplies of labour. A case in point is the use of a human-powered treadle pump, which is being promoted in Bangladesh for the irrigation of staple crops. Evidence indicates that such technologies can impose severe health risks on the weaker members of the household — women in particular — who assume the main burden of work.

Self-targeting through the labour test — offering employment to people at such low levels of payment that the non-poor do not compete for jobs — is another example of the lack of attention to work intensity and well-being issues in poverty alleviation strategies. Self-targeting is an important component of food-for-work programmes, but it may prove to be an "energy trap" for the poor, and especially for women who are ill-equipped to bear the physical cost of additional energy-intensive work without sufficient improvement in caloric intake or nutritional status.

Finally, since an individual engaged in arduous work needs time to recover, it seems logical that *rest* should be taken into account when discussing well-being. If economists were to treat rest as "productive consumption", they would have to revise the idea that the use of labour

saving technologies must be justified by showing the "productive" use of liberated time.

Throughout the discussion on poverty reduction, it is important to remember that women are not always disadvantaged in relation to men.

Throughout the discussion on poverty reduction, it is important to remember that women are not always disadvantaged in relation to men. Gender relations are extremely complex and culturally specific; and work capacities of women and men change during the course of a lifetime. Eradicating poverty requires understanding local situations and designing programmes that move beyond "labour markets" to the real world of work.

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Assessing poverty alleviation strategies for their impact on poor women : A study with special reference to India (DP 97)

Jayati Ghosh

This paper is concerned with the way macro-economic strategies can affect the incidence of poverty, especially among women. It also explores the effectiveness of various forms of government intervention in this regard. The focus is on India, but the analysis may have implications for other developing countries as well.

The period between 1973/74 and 1989/90 was characterized by a sustained decline in poverty ratios in both rural and urban India. This process is no longer clearly evident for the subsequent period, i.e. post-1990. While the traditional explanations of poverty incidence rely on agricultural growth rates and inflation, the observed trends suggest that other factors such as public expenditure and the relative price of foodgrains should be incorporated. It is argued that the single most important reason for the decline in poverty ratios over the 1980s was the increase in real wages of unskilled labour — in both urban and rural areas. This was in turn associated with the direct employment generation, as well as the multiplier effects, of the substantially increased government expenditure evident throughout the 1980s.

Similarly, the deceleration in such expenditure and the sharp increase in food prices in the aftermath of the structural adjustment of the 1990s have been associated with reversal in the earlier downward trends in poverty for all India as well as for most states.

The conclusion is therefore reached that generalized policies of macro-economic contraction associated with stabilization measures, which operate through demand deflation and reduced government expenditure, are likely to have a negative effect on the conditions of poorer groups. Also, any policies (including trade liberalization, the encouragement of agricultural exports, and so on) that increase the relative price of food are likely to lead to increases in poverty. Thus any macro-economic strategy that seeks to reduce the incidence of poverty must consciously abjure, or mitigate, the effects of these two factors.



The paper suggests that the link between employment patterns and poverty is particularly evident for women. The relationship between poverty and asset ownership is also very important, since women in South Asia are typically denied ownership of land and other important assets.

Specific poverty alleviation strategies of the Indian government are also assessed by the author in terms of their impact on poor women. These include the public distribution system for foodgrain (PDS), self-employment schemes and wage employment schemes.

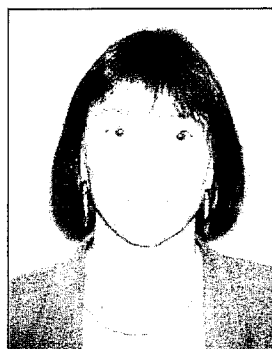
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Land Reform and Gender in Post-Apartheid South Africa (DP 98)

Cherryl Walker

Post-apartheid South Africa has embarked on a market-driven programme of land reform that can be described both as very ambitious, when measured against existing constraints, and as very modest, when measured against popular demand and need.



Perhaps the most radical component of the programme is the explicit policy commitment to gender equality as a long-term goal, which involves targeting women as a major category of beneficiaries in the short to medium term. Gender issues are addressed in all three components of the land reform programme: land redistribution, land restitution and tenure reform. Designing and implementing the land reform strategy remains a difficult task for a number of reasons.

Perhaps the greatest constraint is summed up in a South African catch phrase of the 1990s — "lack of capacity" on the part of government. The seriousness of the problem is illustrated by the fact that the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) is not able to spend all the funds allocated for acquisition of land.

The second key constraint is associated with the strength of patriarchal attitudes, as well as the government's reluctance to intervene actively to curb the

powers of traditional authorities at the local level. The institutions of rural local government are still transitional, with a low level — but, from a gender point of view, crucial — political struggle under way over the extent to which traditional leaders (i.e. chiefs) will continue to exercise real power over the allocation of resources, including land. There is serious tension between the government's commitment to gender equality, on the one hand, and its reluctance to alienate these neo-traditionalist structures of rural local government, on the other.

The third constraint is created by the absence of a strong lobby campaigning for women's land rights in rural areas. Most rural women, like most rural men, see land primarily as a social rather than an economic resource, and look to urban jobs as the route to household economic survival and advancement. Farming is very often one element in the array of strategies that women deploy to ensure their survival

and that of their children. It is not, however, one that they regard as the most rewarding in terms of income generation, nor does farming define their interest in land.

It is too early to judge the success of the land reform programme, but not too early to state that there is absolutely no basis for complacency. The chances that far greater resources and political importance will be granted to the programme in the next few years are minimal, although one can anticipate an increase in the rhetoric of land reform as the elections of 1999 approach and government programmes attract closer attention.

Cherryl Walker is currently the Regional Land Claims Commissioner for the KwaZulu Natal Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights, in South Africa.

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UNRISD collaborates with the Research Council of Norway

Workshop on Gender,
Poverty and Well-being
25-26 September 1998, Oslo

The Research Council of Norway and the Royal Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs have for some time been engaged in planning a new research programme, which is now established under the title — *Globalization and Marginalization: Multi- and Inter-disciplinary Research on Development Paths in the South*. As the summary document of the programme puts it, by identifying “globalization and marginalization” as its running theme, the programme “plays on the need to increase our understanding of how global, regional and local forces and currents interact, influence one another and establish synergistic effects and conflicts in a multifarious, heterogeneous world undergoing rapid change”. One of the thematic focuses identified as an important area for research is poverty, while gender is emphasized as a cross-cutting concern that needs to be integrated in all six thematic fields. Indicative of its overall approach, the programme document identifies “free, critical research to stimulate increased diversity and expertise” and the need to establish “professionally co-ordinated networks around the key themes” as two of its main objectives. These are also two of the deeply cherished goals that UNRISD has set itself since its very early days.

Given the similarities in approach, and the overlapping interests, the Research Council of Norway has asked UNRISD to provide intellectual input for its forthcoming workshop in Oslo on the theme of *Gender, Poverty and Well-being*. A selected number of paper-writers from the Trivandrum workshop (see p. 5) will be attending the Oslo meeting to present their findings. In addition, the Research Council is inviting a number of Norwegian scholars to comment upon these papers in the light of their own research experiences, while others will make contributions on the basis of their ongoing research in related areas, such as women and the welfare state in Norway. The final session of the workshop will explore the opportunities for future research collaboration between UNRISD and the Research Council of Norway. ■

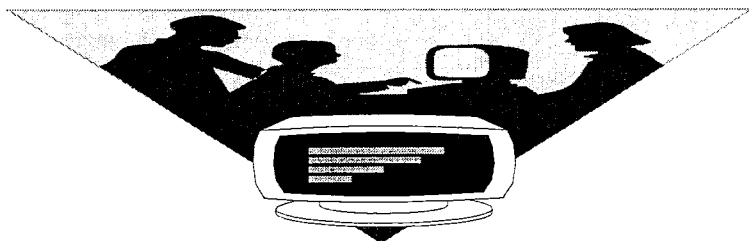
Launch of UNRISD ON~LINE

<http://www.unrisd.org>

Since its debut in June 1996, the UNRISD Web site has attracted over 300,000 visitors — an average of nearly 14,500 per month. This level of activity was one of the factors that prompted UNRISD to consider more carefully the potential of Internet technology and how the Institute might offer additional information to individuals and organizations interested in UNRISD work. In April, a new Web site, UNRISD ON-LINE, was launched. The new site includes many more full-text publications, up-to-date information on the UNRISD programme of research, an improved publications catalogue, as well as other features.

The site is organized in seven easy-to-use sections: *About UNRISD* includes background on the history and methodology of the Institute, and answers to frequently asked questions. *Research Programme* provides brief descriptions of UNRISD research projects as well as links to in-depth information on project activities. *Publications* includes a catalogue of all UNRISD titles and links to over 60 full-text publications, including many on gender issues. *Global Conferences* provides coverage of UNRISD-organized conferences and public meetings, as well as work carried out by the Institute for United Nations mega-conferences. *Policy Briefs* are available on environment, illicit drugs, structural adjustment and other issues. *Viewpoints* highlights short think-pieces on a variety of topics, including corporate environmentalism, globalization and urbanization. Press releases, independent reviews of UNRISD publications and citations of UNRISD work in the media are grouped under *Media Information*.

UNRISD ON-LINE also features links to related sites; an e-mail list to keep users informed of monthly updates; and two major project Web sites, *The Global Forum on Post-Conflict Rebuilding* and *Information Technologies and Social Development*. ■



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