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## Gender equality

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# Gender Equality

Striving for Justice in  
an Unequal World

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





# Gender Equality Striving for Justice in an Unequal World

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# Executive summary

## After Beijing: Uneven progress in an unequal world

Ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing an important question that many women's organizations around the world will be asking is how much has been achieved in the past decade? For those interested in the quest for gender equality, the answers are difficult to find as well as being ambiguous.

There have clearly been some notable gains for women over the period: increased visibility in elected assemblies and state institutions; some closing of gender gaps in primary, and to a lesser extent secondary, school enrolment; a larger female presence in the labour market and in labour flows that cross international borders; and lower fertility rates.

Such changes in women's lives are associated with the social transformations that attend economic development, but they are not simply the by-product of economic growth. In many instances change in women's social position has been instigated or accelerated by state reforms and social movements. Women's movements, both national and transnational, took advantage of the changed political context of the 1990s to advance women's rights. One of the remarkable achievements was in bringing issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, violence against women, and inequality of power in gender relations to the centre of global and national debates.

## The persistence of gender inequalities

Such positive outcomes must be qualified in the light of continuing gender inequalities, and a less than favourable economic and political environment.

Despite women's greater numerical presence in the world of work and in the domain of politics, the narrowing of these broadly defined gender gaps conceals marked gender asymmetries and segmentation, which place limits on women's access to income, authority and power. Declining fertility continues to improve women's life chances in their reproductive years in many countries, but in some countries it has also been associated with an increase in artificially high ratios of males to females in the population, because of discriminatory behaviour towards females. At a more general level, the ambivalent nature of women's achievements is illustrated in the "feminization" of the labour force, whereby women's access to paid work has increased in most countries, but coincided with a deterioration in the terms and conditions of work for many.

There is no single explanation for these various outcomes. Gender inequalities are deeply entrenched in all societies, and are reproduced through a variety of practices and institutions, including policy interventions. A question posed in this report is: what contribution does development policy make to bringing about favourable or unfavourable conditions for achieving greater gender equality?

## The disabling policy environment

The neoliberal economic agenda, which rose to dominance in the early 1980s, was centred on fiscal austerity, and the strengthening of private property rights and profit-driven markets, and called for the “rollback” of the state. While inflation was brought under control in many countries, price stability was achieved at the expense of growth and job creation. Financial crises and economic volatility became more frequent, and income inequalities widened all over the world.

In the absence of adequate safety nets, economic liberalization placed the livelihoods of low-income households under severe stress. Under conditions of economic hardship, low-income women became increasingly visible as economic actors outside the household sphere, as casual agricultural labourers, in the overcrowded urban informal economy, and as migrants. Meanwhile, the creeping commercialization of welfare services, particularly in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, meant that poorer households had to adjust by shifting more of the care into the household and onto the shoulders of women and girls.

The social crisis that has continued to hit many parts of the world has been expressed most dramatically in civil unrest and political turmoil, including outbreaks and continuations of civil wars, in which underlying economic and social distress are among the causal dynamics. In such zones of insecurity and pervasive violence, few escape the disastrous impacts of warfare, whether or not they are actively involved as combatants.

## Bringing gender back in

The analytical approach advanced in this report assumes that societies, their social relations, economies and power structures contain deeply etched gender divisions, in the same way that they reflect class, ethnic and racial divisions. Inequalities based on sex are a pervasive feature of all societies; they are the product of socially constructed power relations, norms and practices.

While there is increasing concern with gender inequalities in some arenas—at the intrahousehold level in particular, as well as in the legal domain where “traditions” and “customs” have an important role to play—the attention paid to gender

in public policy is often selective. The resulting silences and omissions are revealing: for example, markets and macroeconomic flows (trade, capital) are not always subjected to gender analysis, the implicit assumption being that they are essentially benign and gender-neutral. However, the report finds that this is true neither of the economy nor of the family; nor do states, communities, political parties or “progressive” social movements necessarily operate in gender-neutral ways.

The analysis undertaken by the report is largely of social relations, and particularly gender relations, across a wide spectrum of institutions. The primary focus, however, is on women, understood as differentiated by class, race, ethnicity and caste. It is important to keep the spotlight on women, in view of the recent shifts in thinking (and language) both in development bureaucracies and in some strands of academic research, which have sometimes inadvertently overlooked the continuing significance of women’s subordination. This does not imply that men are invariably advantaged, even if they might be, in relation to women. Masculinist cultures can be counter-productive or even destructive for men, and while men are the main perpetrators of violence, both domestic and public, they are also the main victims of violence outside the domestic sphere. Nor does the emphasis on women’s subordination imply a static picture of unchanging gender relations: rather, it is important to acknowledge that gender hierarchies constantly change as old forms dissolve and are recreated.

## Current policy agendas: Implications for gender equality

The political and policy context of recent years has presented some new opportunities, as well as challenges, for the attainment of gender equality and women’s rights. The fact that social policies and “good governance” reforms are now high on the development policy agenda seems to offer an important entry point for addressing gender-based inequalities in access to resources and services, and gender-specific capacity and accountability failures on the part of the state.

The now dominant policy package—known as the “post-Washington consensus”—does however retain some of the

core elements of economic orthodoxy, supplemented by the “good governance” agenda of democracy, “participation” and “community ownership”. Behind the apparent consensus forged by a shared vocabulary of “poverty” and “social protection”, conflicting understandings of social policy vie for attention, based on different values, priorities and understandings of state responsibility. Similarly, while a broad understanding of the “good governance” agenda would embrace political liberalization, human rights, and address the problems of social inequality as part of a fundamental commitment to democracy, critics contend that such governance reforms have in fact been dominated by the imposition of undifferentiated and abstract blueprints for institutional reform. This has tended to exclude gender equality. However some governance reforms, in particular the decentralization of political power to local government bodies and municipalities, seem to have facilitated women’s political representation at the local level, with the potential to impact favourably on policy. Such positive outcomes may be difficult to achieve where traditional patriarchal systems at local levels resist women’s active presence in local power structures.

Indeed, a phenomenon to emerge with particular force in recent years is that of “identity politics”, especially in the form of movements that mobilize around ethnic, racial and religious identities. While there have been tensions between some versions of identity-based claims and notions of gender equality, these are not necessarily irreconcilable. But some radical attacks on human rights and women’s rights agendas have resulted from the resurgence of religious identities that include the assertion of “traditional” gender roles and systems of authority. The “traditions” and religious doctrines typically invoked by some of these movements may be neither traditional nor authentic, but instead have been recently coined to serve political ends.

### **Forging links between economic policy and gender equality**

A world in which the dominant policy model tends to deepen social and economic inequality and reinforce marginalization, in which redistribution has no place, and in which

governments compromise the interests of their citizens to accommodate global forces, is unlikely to be a world that secures gender equality. For this reason, women’s rights activists have increasingly been devoting more of their attention and energies to the larger structures of global power, and the evolution of problems of global injustice relating to macro-economic trends. Global economic justice is also central to the achievement of women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Yet bringing the interdependence between global economic justice and gender justice into sharper focus for policy makers is no easy task, and once achieved, requires considerable effort to bring about gender-sensitive policy change.

Moreover, the global political environment in which economic justice and gender justice have to be negotiated has been less favourable in recent years. Human rights and women’s agendas, and the entire multilateral framework within which the gains of the 1990s were made, have been weakened by the current global political crisis occasioned by terrorism, militarism, war and unilateralism. If gender justice is not to slip yet further down the agenda, women’s movements will require new alliances with governmental institutions, social movements and political parties.

## **SECTION 1: MACROECONOMICS, WELL-BEING AND GENDER EQUALITY**

### **Liberalization and deregulation: The route to gender equality?**

Neoliberal macroeconomic policies and associated policies of domestic deregulation have been pursued widely in the developing world in recent decades. They are rooted in the belief that minimal government intervention in the economy and greater reliance on the profit motive and free play of markets lead to a more efficient allocation of economic resources, higher rates of economic growth, widespread development, more

rapidly rising income, and a resulting decline in poverty and inequality. The inference is that women will be equal beneficiaries, and that increased access to jobs, income and education can lead to greater gender equality.

However, analytical insights and mounting empirical evidence provide scant support for such a prospect. This policy approach has not provided a supportive environment for improving women's well-being, overcoming gender biases and eroding gender gaps in basic capacities, opportunities and access to resources. Nor has it brought about a fairer sharing between women and men of the unpaid work and the costs involved in caring for the family and raising children.

Indeed, neoliberalism has proved largely unsuccessful, even in its own terms. Tight monetary and fiscal policies have generally curbed inflation, but this has been at the cost of reduced growth rates in most regions (and particularly the poorest countries), limited structural change, and slow or negative growth in employment. The liberalization of international capital flows has resulted in rising financial and economic volatility, and more frequent and severe financial crises. Many countries have been subject to fiscal squeeze, resulting from reductions in trade and finance-related taxes and from declining tax rates on capital. These have often contributed to a reduction in government expenditures as a share of GDP. In several instances, expenditure cuts have been concentrated in capital expenditures affecting infrastructure, and in others, expenditures on health, education, welfare and social safety nets have been eroded.

Moreover, in most countries there has been little reduction in internal income inequality, and there has been a widespread increase in poverty. Trends in human development, poverty and inequality indicators question the capacity of neoliberal policies to generate social development, in terms of either steady increases in GDP, or improved standards of health and human security.

In sum, the predicted benefits of higher economic growth and poverty reduction have not materialized, and precisely at a time when effective social protection is most needed, the capacity of governments to provide public services and social protection has been widely eroded.

In contrast, however, a number of Asian countries that pursued policies to manage markets rather than to fully liberalize them in pursuit of industrial development have achieved significant success with regard to economic growth, development and poverty reduction. Yet while they have been significantly more successful in advancing some aspects of women's well-being than countries pursuing the neoliberal path, they have not achieved significant all-round advances in gender equality.

## **Liberalization, labour markets and women's gains: A mixed picture**

In an increasingly competitive world economic environment under liberalization, a development strategy that places emphasis on labour-intensive export-oriented production, whether in industry, agriculture or more recently in services, has intensified firms' efforts to hire least-cost labour. Women's relatively lower wages have made them an attractive source of labour, and the result has been an increase in the level and share of female paid employment in many developing countries, often directly or indirectly associated with multinational enterprises.

Nevertheless, evidence regarding improvements in women's well-being and in gender equality deriving from the liberalization of trade and FDI suggests a mixed picture. Indeed, analysis points to a coincidence between gender roles (related to norms that relegate women's paid work to secondary importance after their domestic and care responsibilities), job segregation by industry, and the needs of enterprises in a highly competitive international environment.

In some cases women's pay and conditions are better in export-sector formal jobs than elsewhere in the economy, but many jobs are insecure and dead-end. Women's subcontracted work, including home-based work, is equally if not more precarious, and subject to extremely poor conditions. Nor are women's employment gains always permanent, as is evidenced by declines in the female share of paid employment in the manufacturing sector in many countries. Women who lose jobs

in internationally mobile labour-intensive industries face difficulty in obtaining employment in the more capital-intensive manufacturing industries that may replace them. In addition, competition from cheap imports has led to declines in local manufacturing jobs.

Furthermore, the deflationary bias in macroeconomic policies, leading to slow growth and recessions, has had more serious repercussions for women than for men; for example, unemployment levels are often higher for women than men. Moreover, greater numbers of women than men are to be found in self-employment or wage work in the informal economy.

These employment conditions facing the majority of women make it structurally difficult to raise women's wages and to close gender wage gaps. Indeed, studies of the more rapidly growing Asian economies suggest that the growth of exports of labour-intensive manufactures and economic growth have been most rapid in those countries that had the widest gender wage gaps. Even in some of the most rapidly growing Asian economies, discriminatory portions of wage gaps have not been reduced during the era of globalization.

The financial and economic crises resulting from policies promoting unfettered capital flows have been found to have a differential impact on female and male workers. During the 1997 East Asian crisis, women were often the first to lose their jobs, due to their less secure employment conditions and also to discrimination based on "male breadwinner bias".

### **Public spending: A lifeline for women?**

Constraints on public spending as a result of fiscal squeeze have particularly negative effects on women. Static or reduced government expenditure on infrastructure and public services places a particularly heavy burden on women, as it is they who are principally responsible for household management and unpaid care work. During normal times, the family functions as the surrogate safety net or refuge of last resort, with women bearing the greatest burden in stretching their time and energies between paid and unpaid work; this situation is aggravated in times of economic crisis. This has both short and long-run costs for women as well as for micro- and macro-efficiency.

If female capabilities that would give them access to wider segments of the labour market are to be raised, higher levels of state spending on health and education are essential. There is also need for higher government expenditure on mechanisms for social protection that also cover the female labour force, as this is particularly affected by the insecurity of employment caused by economic volatility, the high labour turnover rates in increasingly flexible labour markets, and women's preponderance in informal work. In sum, the need for the state to protect all its citizens, women and men, from the vagaries of the market is critical in an open, competitive environment.

The privatization of services for fiscal and other reasons also has considerable short-term and potential long-term costs for women. The introduction of user fees by the government has not provided a socially satisfactory solution, particularly from the perspective of women; they frequently bear the burden of managing household budgets on less income and with fewer essential services, and exemption schemes have generally not been found to work in practice.

### **Consolidating women's gains: The need for a broader policy agenda**

In addition to tracking trends in women's absolute status regarding well-being, it is essential to evaluate changes in their status relative to men. This is because gaps both affect and reflect power dynamics, which themselves have the potential for positive change in the processes of resource and capabilities distribution. It is important to assess whether gender gaps in well-being have changed in both fast and slow-growing economies, using a wide range of indicators rather than just the money metric of income per capita.

While there has been some narrowing of gender gaps, there are noticeable exceptions and also reversals, indicating that positive changes are not necessarily stable or enduring. Similarly, the narrowing of gaps also requires careful examination, as this may reflect a reduction in male attainments. Positive trends in female capabilities do not, however, always translate automatically into greater opportunities for women. For example, in

slow-growing economies where jobs are scarce, gender norms play an important part in ensuring that men have a greater claim on job slots than women.

Gender equity is unlikely to be achieved without the empowerment of women. But the mere presence of women in legislatures does not necessarily translate into women-friendly economic policies. The introduction of the ostensibly more participatory approach to formulating development strategies through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), involving consultation with a wide range of civil society representatives, has not proved to be a highly effective vehicle for women's empowerment. The most pertinent failings include a low level of consultation with women's groups, and a frequent lack of integration of gender analysis into the diagnosis of poverty. Generally gender has not featured as an issue in the macroeconomic and development policy analysis, or in the sections of PRSPs concerning the recommended poverty reduction strategy, resource allocation, or monitoring and evaluation.

Which macroeconomic strategies would best promote gender-equitable development that, in addition to enhancing women's capabilities and opportunities to provide for themselves and their families and improve their well-being relative to men, also improved their bargaining power within the household and in other social institutions? In principle, it would be reasonable to expect that such improvements would most likely be achieved when there are relatively rapid economic growth, macroeconomic stability, a favourable external economic environment, expanding formal employment opportunities, redistributive taxation and public spending, and social policies that also embrace women.

Feminist economists have joined heterodox economists in identifying the components of an alternative macroeconomic policy package, and associated policies that would provide developing countries with a wider range of policy instruments, and give them greater scope for tailoring policies to their particular circumstances. However they recognize that, though necessary, changes in macroeconomic policy are not sufficient.

The extent to which macroeconomic policies promote gender equality does not only depend on their ability to

enhance economic growth. The effects of economic growth are gender-differentiated, as growth operates through various types of markets, through intrafamily and intrahousehold resource distribution, and through public spending. Each of these last elements are subject to the pervasive influence of social norms regarding the roles and rights of women. Hence women's and men's capabilities, their access to resources such as time, land, credit and income, and their ability to obtain social insurance, differ. For example, in relation to earned income, the effect of macroeconomic policies is mediated through a system of gendered job segregation, even when there is an otherwise level playing field between men and women in terms of educational qualifications, skills and control over assets. This implies that economic policy alone is unlikely to bring about gender equality.

Therefore, to effect substantial improvement in key aspects of women's well-being and greater gender equity, measures specifically designed to address gender-based inequalities and constraints are also essential. Concerted efforts are also needed to erode the norms and remove the discriminations that account for the persistence of gender segmentation in labour markets. Specific policies are required to remove the structural constraints on women's ability to take up widening labour market opportunities, especially their relative lack of education and appropriate skills, and importantly, their relatively greater responsibility for the provision of unpaid care.

Also, if economic growth is to be widely shared, there is a need for labour market policies and related interventions that affect working conditions in both formal and informal employment situations, and that rectify gender imbalances and discriminatory practices. The solution would also involve the improvement of core labour standards (which include the prohibition of all forms of discrimination and the principle of equal pay for work of equal value) and the creation of decent conditions of work, including the right to social protection for all workers, formal and informal, as well as the evolution of "family-friendly" workplace practices. Other necessary policy measures include gender policy objectives for public expenditures, and mechanisms such as gender-responsive budget audits to monitor implementation.

Finally, these changes depend largely on the mobilization of women themselves, whose case needs to be built on rigorous analysis and a clear vision of where appropriate policy interventions are most needed.

## SECTION 2: WOMEN, WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

### The feminization and informalization of labour

Over the past three decades women's economic activity rates have been rising in most parts of the world, with the exception of Eastern and Central Europe (since 1989) and the Middle East and North Africa, where women's economic activity rates remain low by international standards. Despite the increase in work for pay by women, labour markets continue to be segmented by gender. Even in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, where women's labour-force participation has been rising, there is continuing gender difference in labour markets, which is nowadays largely based on time, with men working full-time and women working part-time (given their disproportionate share of unpaid care work). There is also a substantial earnings gap between men and women, in part because many women work part-time; but there are also earnings gaps among full-time workers, which reflect occupational segregation and the fact that "women's jobs" earn lower wages.

Furthermore, the intensification of women's paid work over the past decades has been paralleled by a deterioration in the terms and conditions of much of the work on offer.

The new concept of "informal employment" defines it as employment without secure contracts, worker benefits or social protection. According to recent International Labour Organization (ILO) statistical evidence, informal employment constitutes one half to three-quarters of non-agricultural employment in developing countries, and tends to be a larger source of employment for women than for men in all developing regions except North Africa.

Rural impoverishment has historically contributed to migration into urban areas, and continues to do so. A large contingent of young rural migrant women can be found on the lowest, least visible, rung of the informal employment ladder. Many lack the skills and connections needed to secure more stable jobs with decent pay. They are typically engaged in small-scale domestic production, increasingly under competitive pressure from cheaper imported goods. Others engage in a variety of service occupations and in petty trading.

In many parts of the world, types of employment relationship are emerging that are purposely disguised to avoid labour legislation and deny social benefits. In other cases there may be a contract, but the relationship is deliberately disguised as a commercial transaction. Often the employment relationship is ambiguous: for example, workers operate at home on an exploitative piece-rate basis outside the purview of labour legislation. Many female homeworkers process products in the global value chain, while others work on articles destined for the domestic market. The payment they receive is extremely low; many also use their children as subsidiary workers. These areas are untouched by labour laws and social welfare.

Patterns of informalization differ from region to region, but the overall trend is discouraging in terms of prospects for realizing women's rights and well-being. A promising development of the 1990s, however, has been the emergence of new forms of organizing among women workers in the informal economy, both domestically and internationally. However, many of the new trade unions, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) responding to women workers' rights, face difficulties in expanding their reach and becoming sustainable. Trade unions and NGOs also face challenges in alliance-building to broaden the scope and reach of their efforts beyond the more visible "traded" sectors.

Collective action through democratic organizational routes presents the only practicable avenue for regulating and improving the conditions of work of informal women workers. The idea that the formalization of property rights constitutes the solution to the problems of the informal economy—a view that is being endorsed by some international organizations—

has no validity as far as working women are concerned. Most of these women have no “property” to be registered, and engage in the informal economy because they cannot find work in the formal sector.

## The changing terms of rural living

During the 1980s, many African and Latin American countries suffered economic crisis, and this was diagnosed by the international financial institutions (IFIs) as stemming directly from heavy state involvement in the economy. The agricultural sector was seen as a prime victim of state-directed regimes.

In truth, most developing country states were heavily involved in the economy, due to the widespread belief that markets on their own were inadequate for building a strong economy. Agricultural prices were artificially depressed by overvalued exchange rates and export taxes; but this was to some extent redressed through positive resource transfers into the sector via public investment, subsidized credit and inputs, and agricultural services and marketing. Such public provision has come under attack.

Subsequent reforms, however, have not adequately addressed some of the long-standing problems afflicting the agrarian economy. In Latin America the economic reforms have tended to reinforce, rather than redress, existing divides between regions and producers. One of the downsides of liberalization in the region has been the rise in agricultural imports, with an often severely detrimental impact on rural livelihoods. In sub-Saharan Africa food crop production has not increased, while the performance of export crops has been very uneven; the problems of food insecurity remain dire in many countries. In many contexts credit systems have collapsed, and there has been a sharp decline in input use, especially among smallholders.

Rural livelihoods have become more insecure, as well as more diversified, in contexts where cutbacks in state support to domestic agriculture have coincided with increasing exposure to competition from large subsidized producers. Volatile and depressed commodity prices have trapped large numbers of rural people in poverty, hunger and even famine.

Gender-differentiated examination of the implications of economic reform for rural livelihoods is difficult. National agricultural statistics are inadequate in a number of key respects, some of which stem from using either the individual holder, or the holding, as the unit of analysis. This means that the relationships between the members of farming households cannot be assessed. Case studies of changing gender relations under the unfolding impact of liberalization are few and far between.

Where they can, smallholders have moved out of traditional cash crop production and into the production of more lucrative crops. How has this affected male and female household producers? A view which gained currency in the 1990s was that the weak “supply response” of African agriculture to liberalization could be ascribed to the inflexibility of gender roles within households and women’s unwillingness to contribute unpaid labour to cash crops controlled by their husbands. But these intrahousehold gender constraints and conflicts of interest have been exaggerated. There are significant areas of common interest between husbands and wives in smallholder households, and considerable evidence of flexibility in gender roles in agriculture. If liberalization has failed to enhance agricultural production, it has much more to do with the broader constraints on smallholders that liberalization itself has exacerbated, rather than the economic consequences of intrahousehold gender roles and conflicts.

Several overlapping processes over the past 30 years have contributed to changes in the gender division of labour among Latin American smallholders, sometimes described as a tendency towards the “feminization of agriculture”. During the recent liberalization era, women’s participation in agriculture appears to have changed: they are no longer merely “secondary” workers. Women are emerging as farm managers, providing the bulk of family farm labour as men migrate in search of alternative sources of income. By withdrawing direct state support to domestic food production, agricultural reform has galvanized this process. In addition, exports of traditional agricultural products such as coffee have declined as a result of global trade liberalization and depressed commodity markets. The “feminization of agriculture” is therefore a phenomenon associated

with the lack of viability of smallholder agricultural production in the current era.

Besides the changes in smallholder farming, two other important trends have emerged as companions to liberalization. The first and most directly attributable is the growth of large-scale corporate export farming, particularly of high-value horticultural products such as flowers, fruits and vegetables. This is a significant new source of employment for rural women in many parts of the world (especially Latin America), even though women are overwhelmingly employed in more insecure, less well-paid, and lower-skilled activities, without opportunities for advancement. The second is the more general diversification of smallholder livelihoods, with men, women and child household members being increasingly propelled into off-farm activities to avert poverty. In some cases, the incomes earned are so poor that diversification in fact contributes to a cycle of impoverishment. Women tend to be overwhelmingly clustered in low-return activities to which they are driven by survival needs.

One of the major lessons of the experience of economic reform and liberalization is that the resource poverty of farmers prevents them from taking up new opportunities. A critical asset in the rural economy remains land. In many countries women's rights activists have been closely involved in policy debates on land tenure, often alongside other civil-society groups. Such efforts led to significant progress in the passing of more gender-equitable land tenure laws during the 1990s.

Even where women's rights are formally recognized, there continues to be a substantial gap between the legal recognition of their right to own or hold land, and their effective access to land. The reasons for this gap are complex and varied. But two significant policy trends require attention if poorer women in particular are to have access to land on a secure basis: the emphasis on developing markets in land (which are likely to exclude poorer women), and the resurgence of policy interest in various local and informal mechanisms and institutions for land management (where it may be difficult for women's interests to find a clear articulation and be acted upon).

## Cross-border migration of workers

The movement of people from countryside to town or across international borders has become an established feature of many people's livelihoods, entailing both positive and negative manifestations and opportunities for the countries and individuals involved. The contemporary patterns and nature of cross-border flows are characterized by three broad trends: an increasing shift toward temporary migration (of the highly skilled and semi or unskilled), rising numbers of undocumented migrants, and the feminization of migration. Despite continuing differences in migration regimes between different clusters of countries, there is an emerging convergence towards selective migration, where highly skilled workers are welcomed, based on the belief that they will integrate more easily and contribute more to the economy, whereas low-skilled immigrants are regarded as hard on the public purse, and their numbers therefore ostensibly need to be controlled. Such stratifications are also gendered, given men's preponderance among the highly skilled strata.

Women's position on the bottom rung of the labour market, the low value accorded to domestic and caring work which many migrant women undertake in industrialized societies, and the lack of social protection in irregular occupations, especially in the "entertainment and hospitality" industries, mean that many women are vulnerable to exploitation. The fact that many highly educated women from developing countries undertake unskilled or semi-skilled jobs raises the issue of deskilling, which is rarely addressed in policy.

In North America and Europe, the principal framework within which women migrate continues to be as spouses or dependants of male principal applicants. Only where labour flows are destined for female-typed jobs, such as nurses and domestics, do women predominate as economic migrants. In some European countries, women in the caring professions are increasingly sought to fill gaps in health, social and care services and as domestics, at wages or under terms only acceptable to migrant women. Their remittances are nonetheless highly significant to the household economy from which they come.

Women from Eastern and Southeast Asia are increasingly migrating to neighbouring countries or further afield in search of opportunities. The more positive side of the picture is some female entry into information technology and other upwardly mobile employment. The downside is the overwhelming presence of women in the “entertainment” sector and the private sphere as domestic helpers: two areas of employment not covered by labour laws and thus prone to high levels of abuse.

Discrimination against immigrants, combined with racial and gender inequalities, makes migrant women “triply disadvantaged” and likely to be over-represented in marginal, unregulated and poorly paid jobs. At the same time, the experience of migration—whether by women on their own or jointly with men—has the potential to reconfigure gender relations and power inequalities. Opportunities emerge to improve lives and escape previously oppressive situations.

## The search for a new social policy agenda

Livelihoods in today’s world are subject to a range of insecurities. Formal social protection mechanisms are missing in many developing countries for the millions of women and men who work in the informal economy (as well as for some even in the formal economy). Contingencies such as ill-health, childbirth and old age are themselves powerful drivers of impoverishment, as earnings fall and assets are depleted to purchase health care in increasingly commercialized contexts.

There has recently been more recognition of these realities. The 1990s saw a shift in global policy pronouncements, acknowledging the vital role of social policy in the development process. However, considerable tension exists between different policy approaches regarding the scope and institutional mechanisms of social policy. The IFIs champion an approach in which the state only fills gaps and provides safety nets for the truly indigent, while the non-poor seek social provision through the market. The underlying assumption is that targeted public provision is the way to achieve greater social inclusion. This assumption, however, is open to question.

Means testing and targeting are often the last resort of unequal societies; they can trap people in poverty, generate social exclusion and entrench inequality, rather than deal with inequality through redistribution; they are also very demanding as far as the administrative capacity of the state is concerned.

An alternative view holds that social objectives have to be integrated within development strategies, and that the state has to be a major player in providing resources to ensure social protection inclusively. Social policies founded on principles of universalism and redistribution, with strong cross-subsidies from the better-off, tend to be more sustainable, both financially and politically.

Both the process of social policy reform and its outcomes are inescapably gendered. The early efforts to provide formal social protection in many developing countries were biased towards men, who were over-represented in the formal sector. However, while efforts could have been made to cover a much wider range of people, there has in fact been a reversal over the past two decades. In many regions there has been a strong thrust towards the commodification of social services and social protection by imposing various “user charges” for public services and expanding market-based provision. Hence, the “male breadwinner model” is being eroded not by gender-equitable reform of state-based entitlements, but by their drastic reduction.

The impacts of commodification are likely to be felt most strongly by women, given the gender ordering and stratification across private and public institutions. These include intra-household resource allocations (where girls are likely to receive a smaller proportion of household investments in health and education than boys); market institutions (where women tend to be more cash-constrained than men, given their disadvantages in labour and credit markets), in the unpaid care economy (where a disproportionate share of unpaid care is provided by women and girls when formal social provision remains out of reach); and the public social care sector (where working pressures generated during public-sector reforms are likely to fall most heavily on women workers, given that they are predominantly located at the lowest rungs of skill, authority and

remuneration). Yet debates on social policy have failed to engage with how men and women will be differently affected or involved.

Health care reforms, with a focus on the marketization of care and drugs, have been built on a number of hidden gendered assumptions, including that women—the principal clients—will be able to procure money for fees, and also be able to take on more unpaid care responsibilities. This has come at a time when the HIV/AIDS epidemic has imposed severe economic and social strains on families, especially in Africa. Evidence on reform outcomes points to patient exclusion; rises in maternal and newborn morbidity; and increasing gaps in wages and working conditions between senior clinicians and the nursing work mainly performed by women.

In the case of pension reforms, the move towards privatization has major gender implications. The fact that pension benefits in privatized systems are strictly determined by the overall amount of money contributed by the insured person, and that women typically earn less money and work for fewer years than men (given their care responsibilities), means that women receive considerably lower benefits. Since women's higher life expectancy is taken into account in most private systems, women's benefits are further comparatively depressed. In public systems with defined benefits, some of the disadvantages faced by women can be mitigated by generous minimum pensions, by the fact that life expectancy does not affect benefit levels, and by credits sometimes given for years spent caring for children.

By extending the coverage of existing social protection programmes (health insurance and pension provision) to new groups of informal workers, and by facilitating cross-subsidies, some important efforts are being made, in a diverse range of countries, to extend the reach of existing social protection mechanisms. These more inclusive social systems are being forged in contexts where there has been a great deal of contestation and debate concerning social responsibility, and where there is an ideological commitment to social equality.

## SECTION 3: WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

### Women in public office: A rising tide

Since 1995 women's visibility in, and impact on, public life has grown. Although the average number of women in national assemblies has only increased from 9 per cent to almost 16 per cent, in 16 countries the proportion has reached 30 per cent or more. This is the critical threshold at which it is thought that women in office can change the culture, practice and outcomes of politics to respond better to gender equality concerns.

Women of course voice their interests in a wide variety of political and civic associations, so women's political participation cannot be measured in terms of numbers and proportions of women in national assemblies alone. However, enabling more women to succeed in competitive politics remains an important challenge for women's movements around the world, as does the project of building their effectiveness, once in office, in advancing women's rights. Contemporary women's movements are particularly concerned to identify the determinants of higher rates of women's access to formal politics, as well as the features of political systems that support a progressive gender-equality legislative agenda.

Cultural, educational and other differences affect women's participation in civil society, but do not easily explain their presence or absence in elected assemblies. Electoral systems are the best predictor of the numbers of women in formal politics. Those with electoral systems based on proportional representation (PR) tend to return assemblies with a higher average of women politicians than those with plurality/majority systems or semi-proportional systems. But electoral systems alone do not determine numbers of women in politics. Other determinant factors include the presence and type of affirmative action system, party systems and ideologies, the presence of women in the executive, and the responsiveness of the bureaucracy to women's interests.

During the last 10 years, there has been considerable experimentation with the use of affirmative action in order to meet

the goal of gender parity in representative politics. Quotas on party electoral lists are the most common means; today they are in use in over 80 countries. They are most effective where there are large electoral districts, and requirements that women are spaced evenly on lists: a “zipped” list, or a “zebra” list in southern Africa, contains alternating women and men. Where there are penalties for non-compliance, such as withholding of campaign subsidies, co-operation is better assured. In simple plurality systems, measures to reserve seats for women have been preferred over quotas for women candidates. However, reserved seats have sometimes been a way of boosting government majorities, undermining the perceived legitimacy of their occupants, and sometimes making it difficult for women politicians to build credible relationships with the women’s movement.

Parties on the ideological left, or willing to commit the public sector to compensate for inequalities in the private sphere, have been more responsive to gender equality concerns and supportive of women in politics.

Despite women’s greater prominence in political life, they have in many cases yet to translate their visibility into leadership positions and influence over the decision-making process: there are still many instances where they are simply used as an extension of male power structures. The transition from a heightened presence of women in politics to actual advance for gender equality issues and women-friendly policies takes time, and will depend upon the effectiveness of women’s movements in holding governments to account, and on the capacity of public sector agencies to translate ambitious gender-equity policy agendas into effective implementation. This is a matter of good governance in women’s favour.

## Women mobilizing to reshape democracy

A strong and autonomous women’s movement can greatly magnify the influence of women in representative politics, and indeed of national advocacy bureaucracies (such as an equal opportunities commission), providing an external base of support and legitimacy. Although a unified agenda is difficult to

discern in the great variety of women’s associational activity, women are well mobilized in civil society almost everywhere. The globalization of communications has created new opportunities, enabling women to experiment with new means for holding key actors—governments, corporations and international organizations—to account for their actions in relation to women’s rights. Global conferences have enabled women to network internationally, and conferred legitimacy on their participation in global policy debates. Female mobilization and solidarity also occur in trades unions, political parties, mass organizations, and civil society groups vocal on behalf of women members.

A notable feature of women’s associational activity in the past decade has been the central role women have played in many democratization struggles. Recent transitions to democratic forms of government in Latin America and South Africa have offered opportunities to women to claim space for gender equality in newly emerging or reformed institutions. Although women’s positions tend to be profoundly divergent on many issues, there has been a patch of common ground on which many converge: the demand for gender parity in public office. Since the late 1990s, civil society campaigns for equal representation with men have gathered momentum, backing reforms to electoral systems, including through constitutional revision, that support women’s ability to run for office.

While political liberalization has enabled some women’s movements to flourish, in some contexts it has been accompanied by loss of momentum in feminist politics. In Eastern Europe, for instance, where feminism has been associated with a repressive state, it has taken most of the decade for women’s movements to regroup. In other contexts, where political liberalization has been only partial, disillusionment with states that fail to deliver either development or democracy appears to have contributed to the growing appeal to women of conservative ethnic and religious movements.

Some of these identity-based forms of mobilization assert the superiority of “traditional” gender roles along with systems of patriarchal authority, particularly where “women’s liberation” is seen as part of unwelcome modernization. Women’s deportment, mobility, dress and roles within the family are often central

to the cultural revival or pious society the groups proclaim; women's behaviour is upheld as a marker of authenticity and moral integrity. Although women are rarely given access to institutional power within these groups, they are encouraged to engage in their political activities, and even to become highly militant and visible activists because of their great symbolic impact.

## Gender and “good governance”

Programmes of governance reform have recently attracted considerable international and national attention. Good governance is seen as the essential condition enabling economic reform programmes to function effectively, and is at the core of the current emerging “post-Washington consensus”. The concept of “good governance”, however, is given different meanings by different policy actors. Although IFI reform packages address issues of government legitimacy and the public participation of socially excluded groups, critics believe they are dominated by a narrower preoccupation: the use of “governance” reforms to expand market activity and its supporting institutions, especially private property rights. In such circumstances, governance reform is not sympathetic to gender concerns and may even undermine them. To tackle gender equity, programmes of reform must take into account from the outset the way in which formal and informal institutions are shaped by unequal gender relations. These institutions will tend to reproduce gender-based inequality unless they are appropriately redesigned during the reform process.

The gendered dimensions of current governance reforms have not been given appropriate consideration except in discussions on decentralization. Yet there are gender-specific capacity failures in all public institutions targeted for reform. Public expenditure management systems fail to acknowledge women's needs, or distribute budgetary resources equally. The civil service and judiciary may be dominated by men. Women workers clustered at the bottom of state bureaucracies may be the first to be fired when cost-cutting efficiencies are introduced. “Rule of law” reforms may limit women's scope to profit from informal private enterprise, or fail to secure assets over which they previously enjoyed customary rights. Legislative committees may

be ill-equipped to conduct a gender analysis of the bills they review. Some policy makers do advocate women's greater participation in politics and the public sector—on the instrumental basis that they may be less corrupt than men. Whether this is indeed the case (the evidence for it is uneven), it is not the appropriate starting point for a gender-sensitive consideration of capacity and accountability problems in the public sector.

Women's associations have prioritized several areas for gender-sensitive public sector reform. These include recruitment quotas to ensure a stronger presence of women in the bureaucracy; the introduction of gender-equity concerns in performance measurement; consultation with women clients of public services, and measures to respond to their complaints; and reforms to legal frameworks and judicial systems to improve women's access to justice. A tool increasingly used for monitoring government spending is the “gender budget” method pioneered in Australia and South Africa. Gender budgets analyse the likely impacts of planned spending, and supply parliamentarians with gender-aware budgetary information in the hope that they will goad the executive into more appropriate spending. In some places they have been effective in exposing the gap between government commitments to certain social policies, and actual spending.

## Decentralization and gender equality

The part of the governance agenda that is focused on the decentralization of authority to local entities has been more sympathetic to gender concerns. Women's participation has actively been encouraged, and women generally, as well as low-income and other socially marginal groups, are expected to benefit from the accountability and service delivery improvements that government in close proximity should provide. Indeed, local government positions are expected to be particularly open to women, because they do not face the mobility and financial constraints at local levels that they face in striving for national public office. A comparison of available statistics on women's engagement at national and local levels, however, shows that this is not consistently the case: sometimes there are

more women in national than in local politics. This alerts us to the significance of resistance to women from traditional patriarchal systems at local levels, and also to the importance of gender-sensitive institutional engineering to improve women's access to local government forums and services.

Various systems of affirmative action have been tried. These include the reservation of a proportion of seats on local councils for women, as in India, and the creation of special electoral wards for women, as in Uganda. However, women face the resistance of entrenched male hierarchies accustomed to control, and hence the likelihood that decentralization may reinforce male sway over local power structures, and their influence over the informal social institutions governing marital relations, conflict resolution, and property rights. As with the case of women in national politics, the situation can change over time. Although experience is mixed, there are signs that women in local government are having a tangible impact on local spending patterns and building social acceptance of women's political authority. NGOs have offered training in capacity-building and women's assertion of their own voice. In some settings, spending patterns have been influenced in the direction of services and amenities favoured by women, such as water supplies and public health. Local government remains a key arena to watch over the next decade, as more and more women assert their leadership ambitions and challenge patriarchal systems at this level.

## SECTION 4: GENDER, ARMED CONFLICT AND THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

### The impacts of conflict on women

Ten years after the Beijing Conference, the world is still enduring an epidemic of armed violence, with 19 major conflicts and many smaller confrontations ongoing in different parts of the globe. Although the number of major conflicts appears to be declining, incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq, ongoing wars

in Sudan, Kashmir and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and failure to end struggles in the Middle East, Colombia, the Chechen Republic and Sri Lanka, present a picture of violence and insecurity affecting millions of people worldwide. Most of these wars are internal, and fighting is not confined to battlefields and "war fronts" but pervades whole populations. Women are caught up in a number of roles, including to some degree as combatants; more importantly, they may become a direct target of attack; and they have to assume extra caring and provider roles for their families in an environment where economic life, formal systems of protection and the rule of law have collapsed.

At stake in today's wars are not only territories, but ethnic and religious identities, control over natural resources, and over lucrative and sometimes illicit trade, such as in drugs and arms. Tensions have been exacerbated by economic crises and their accompanying social distress, and the weakness of state institutions in the face of impoverishment and civil unrest. In a world in which the balance of power is lopsided, and where many people feel economically or politically vulnerable, bonds of common identity (based on religion or ethnicity) often provide a powerful mobilizing force.

During the recent past, women's visibility in war has become especially marked in certain connections. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Rwandan genocide brought to world attention the use of sexual assault as a systematic means of terrorizing populations, and rape has since become internationally recognized as a weapon of war. Thus the full ramifications of conflict borne by women personally have become better appreciated, and some mechanisms of response have been put in place, even while the impacts on women's socially constructed roles as carers and providers have been less well appreciated.

Women have also been given greater credibility in their assumption of peace-making and conflict resolution roles; in some cases they have helped reduce hostilities or bring them to an end. Their life-saving roles in care and refuge provision, and their conduct of humanitarian relief programmes at considerable personal risk, have been less widely noticed; but they are beginning to claim, and win, places at the peace table and in the negotiation of a "gender-friendly" peace.

Although armed violence is commonly regarded as a male preserve, women have long taken on active military roles in wars and revolutions. For some women combatants, military participation stems from their experience as victims; others are coerced into carrying arms or working for military commanders. Yet many women are inspired by identification with the cause in which war is being waged by kin and identity groups. Their participation is not limited to revolutionary and radical causes; chauvinist or nationalistic movements include women among their principal cheerleaders. Women's agency in conflict situations can grow in a variety of different political contexts—democratic, revolutionary and authoritarian—and in strong as well as weak states.

## After conflict: Women, peace building and development

In the context of today's wars, where a peace settlement rarely signals the end of physical insecurity, the postconflict environment cannot be characterized as one in which life for women invariably returns to "normal". The upheaval of war, in which societies and gender relations have been transformed and livelihood systems disrupted, has its own impact on intrapersonal relationships and societal expectations.

Women commonly find their contributions to the war and peace efforts marginalized or disregarded in both official and popular accounts of war (as happened in Europe after the Second World War). Moreover, there seems to be a denial of the fact that shifts in gender relations were required for women to take on their wartime roles. The ideological rhetoric is often about "restoring" or "returning" to a state of gender relations resembling those perceived to have been associated with peace in the past, even though the proposed "restoration of normality" may further undermine women's rights. The challenge to gender relations experienced during war seems to become too great for patriarchal societies to maintain in times of peace.

There are, however, also significant openings for positive change in postwar circumstances. Some wars end in an atmosphere imbued with the desire to build a new type of society;

where the situation of women received a lot of attention during the conflict, it may be possible to push for legal or policy changes to improve the fulfilment of their rights. Where international peacekeeping or reconstruction is involved, there may be external pressure for policies that support women, and funds may be directly available to women's organizations. However, women need to be agile and strategic in the initiatives they adopt: the bodies responsible for devising new institutions of government will tend to disregard gender claims unless these are represented persuasively. Where they are not, livelihood opportunities may be deliberately removed, and other discriminations introduced. In such postconflict actions as sorting out land claims, women may lose rights they had previously asserted. Speedy service reconstruction, especially health care and education, is especially important for women.

In the immediate postwar setting, special measures are often put in place to provide support for ex-combatants before, during and after the processes of "demobilization, development and reintegration". It is still common for women (and child, especially girl) ex-combatants to be relatively marginalized, if not completely neglected, in such programmes, in spite of attention having been drawn to this unsatisfactory state of affairs for nearly a decade.

Nevertheless women have made inroads, even if fewer than they would wish. In recognition of their vulnerability in all stages of war, the UN Security Council's landmark Resolution 1325 in 2000 urges member states to ensure representation of women at all levels of decision making in mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, in order to promote actions necessary for the protection and support of women. This is one helpful sign that women are gaining ground in postconflict activity. A further indication comprised the first ever prosecutions of perpetrators of violence against women in wartime by the tribunals dealing with war crimes in former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. In the case of Rwanda, a Women's Caucus for Gender Justice was formed in 1997 within the International Criminal Court (ICC), thereby helping to ensure that a gender perspective was central to the functioning of the court.

Despite this progress, the majority of sexual crimes against women during wartime still go unpunished. What is more,

wartime prosecutions tend to be painfully slow. Women survivors of such abuse are still stigmatized to a far greater degree than male survivors of human rights abuses. It is therefore not surprising that most women find it very difficult to take legal action and give evidence.

“Truth and reconciliation” procedures have been used to address women’s cases and gain their participation, notably in Rwanda where the traditional Gacaca system has been revived to handle postgenocide disputes. However, the issue of amnesty and truth-telling remains controversial; where amnesty is offered in return for truth-telling, the sense of being deprived of justice could provoke further violence.

The most common abuses under-reported to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are those suffered by women, as indeed are those least prosecuted. Although women sometimes constitute the majority of those giving witness in court regarding acts of violence committed against others, only few speak out regarding acts of sexual violence committed against themselves, unless a strategy of proactive engagement with women and the broader community is put in place (as in the case of the TRC of 2001 in Peru).



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