

WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?

Why we need a gender perspective in development policy

Since the first UN Decade for Women (1975-85), considerable progress has been made in redressing gender inequalities in developing countries. There is now wider understanding of the importance of gender in development policy and practice. However, stark disparities persist - between men's and women's relative status, access to resources, control of assets and decision making powers - undermining sustainable and equitable development. Moreover, economic problems in some countries threaten the achievements of the last two decades.

WORK AND INCOMES

Women are working more outside the household - often under unfavourable conditions.

Rises in women's economic activity rates and share of the labour force have occurred particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, East and South-East Asia and West Asia and North Africa. According to official estimates, women now constitute 37 percent of the paid workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa, 20 percent in South Asia, 35-40 percent in East and South East Asia, and 30 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Much of the expansion in women's work in Latin America is in services; in East, South-East and West Asia and North Africa more new opportunities are occurring in industry. At the same time male economic activity rates are stagnating or falling in up to two thirds of developing countries. In many regions, women and men now form equal numbers of wage earners. There is evidence that women are bearing greater responsibility for household expenditure, as economic pressures on households mount. ^{15, 16}

Women's earnings are between 50 and 90 percent of men's.

In many countries, women earn less than men for the same work. Also, women are concentrated in the lowest status jobs and receive lower pay for this reason. Throughout the 1980s, employment conditions worsened in many countries, and job insecurity increased. Women may be particularly affected by these trends. Women's earnings in the informal sector are significantly lower than men's and many women work as unpaid family labour. Nevertheless, women's earnings are vital for households; a study in Zambia showed that the importance of women's informal sector earnings to total family income increased dramatically in the 1980s. ^{2, 15, 16}

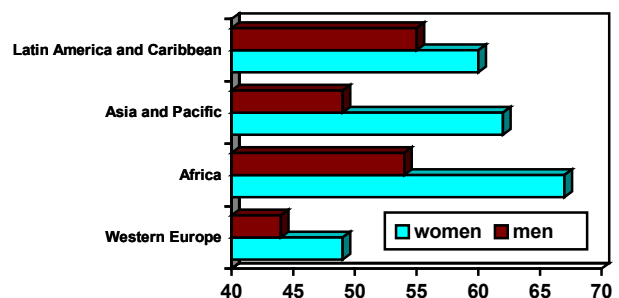
Women work mainly in agriculture and the informal sector with limited support services.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, 78 percent of economically active women are engaged in agricultural work. In South Asia, the proportion is 62 percent and in South East and East Asia and Oceania, 50 percent. Up to 40 percent of women working in agriculture do so as unpaid family labour. An FAO study showed that in Africa women make up 80 percent of food producers but receive only 2-10 percent of extension contacts. ¹⁶ A high proportion of economically active women are self employed: in Africa 53 percent, in Latin America and the Caribbean 26 percent and in South Asia 52 percent. In the informal sector, women are concentrated in a narrow range of occupations, particularly personal services and petty trade; men's activities are more diverse.

Women everywhere work longer hours than men.

Prior to 1975, women in Latin America and the Caribbean worked on average three hours less than men per week; now evidence shows that they work six hours more. In Africa, Asia and the Pacific, women work 12-13 hours a week more than men. They spend correspondingly less time on leisure and sleep. In Africa women spend 5-15 hours per week collecting water; in Asia, 4-7 hours. Falling real incomes mean that women must economise on household expenditure, often in ways which require more domestic labour. In many developing countries, in the late 1980s, poor women were working 60-90 hours a week to maintain the living standards of the late 1970s. ¹⁶ Despite their heavy workloads, women are still too often seen by policy makers primarily as a source of voluntary labour for development activities at

Average weekly hours worked by women and men, including housework, 1976-88



Source: *The World's Women*, United Nations, 1991

community level.

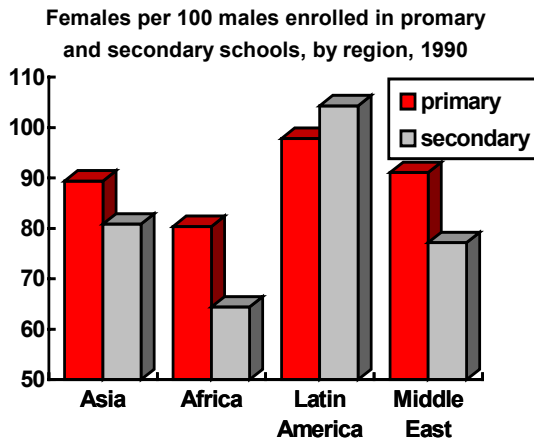
Certain groups of women are particularly vulnerable to poverty.

Some categories of female headed households - for example, divorced or deserted women, elderly widows, or young single mothers with children, depending on the context - may be particularly vulnerable to poverty. The proportion of female headed households ranges from 15 to 45 percent of all households and is thought to be increasing in some countries. Traditional systems of social support are weakening and men are increasingly reluctant to enter formal unions. Although there is no strong evidence that women are systematically poorer than men, it is harder for women to escape from poverty. ^{7, 10}

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Women get only half of the years of schooling that men do in developing countries.

The gender gap in school enrolment at primary level has narrowed considerably in the last 30 years. Slower



Source: Compiled from UNDP, 1994

progress has been made at secondary and tertiary levels. Progress has been particularly limited in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In eleven out of twenty four Sub-Saharan African countries, primary enrolment ratios declined between 1980 and 1986. In the late 1980s, in Sub-Saharan Africa, female primary school enrolment was 82 percent of male enrolment, secondary school enrolment 65 percent of male levels, and tertiary enrolment, 33 percent. In Bangladesh, female primary school enrolment is around 70 percent of male levels, and the female to male ratio of secondary school enrolment is 40 percent; the corresponding figures for Pakistan are 50 percent and 37 percent. Drop out rates are higher for girls than for boys in the majority of African and Asian countries. Women's lower educational qualifications exacerbates their labour market disadvantage. ^{6, 16, 17}

More women than men are illiterate in every region of the world.

Over 40 percent of **young** women (20-24 years) are illiterate in Africa and South and West Asia. 70 percent of women over 25 are illiterate. Illiteracy is particularly serious among rural and indigenous women. ¹⁶

Unsafe pregnancy and childbirth is the biggest killer of women in developing countries

Maternal mortality rates in Africa and South Asia are over 30 times those in developed regions. In Sub-Saharan Africa nearly 700 women die in childbirth for every 100,000 live births; in South Asia the figure is over 600; in Latin America, 200. A major contributing factor is the lack of trained birth attendants: in Sub-Saharan Africa, 62 percent, in South Asia, 74 percent and in South-East Asia, 55 percent of births are not attended by trained medical personnel. 51 percent of pregnant women in Africa and 59 percent in Asia are anaemic, adding to their susceptibility to complications in pregnancy and childbirth. ^{16, 19}

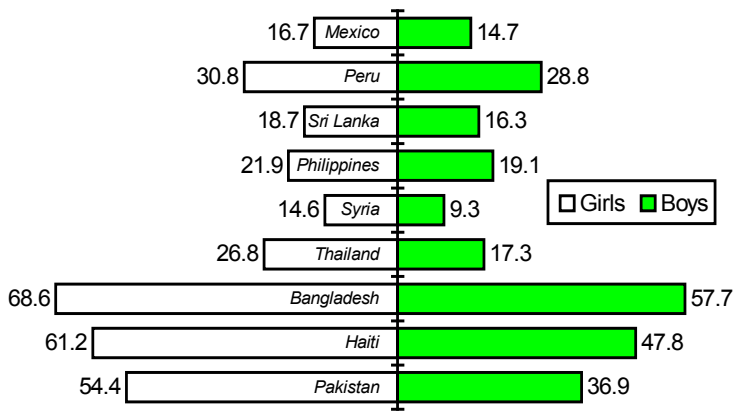
In developing countries, increasing numbers of women are affected by HIV/AIDS.

In 1991, an estimated three million women were infected with HIV in Africa, 250,000 in Latin America and 230,000 in Asia; the rate of infection of women is rising faster than that of men. In Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America, the proportion of infected women has risen to equal that of men. ^{5, 13} An association between female poverty, powerlessness and HIV infection has been found in parts of Africa. Women's risk of HIV and other STD infection is exacerbated by low rates of contraceptive use in some regions, particularly Africa. Usage of barrier methods which offer protection against HIV transmission are particularly low. ^{14, 16, 20}

Women's health and well being is endangered by widespread male violence.

Little trend data exist, but violence against women is widespread worldwide. In Bangladesh, 50 percent of reported murders are wife killings. In Santiago, Chile, 80 percent of women reported suffering physical, emotional or sexual abuse by a male partner or relative and 63 percent reported current abuse. One out of every three women in Peru who visit hospital emergency rooms is a victim of domestic violence. In Papua New Guinea, 67 percent of rural women and 56 percent of urban women have been victims of wife abuse, according to a national survey. ^{3, 14}

Deaths per year per 1000, population aged 2-5 years



Source *The World's Women, United Nations, 1991*

Girls are more vulnerable to early death than boys.

In 43 out of 45 developing countries for which recent data are available, mortality rates for girls aged one to four are higher than those for boys. In South Asia and Latin America, girls under five receive less medical care than boys; in India and Pakistan certain groups of girls under five receive less food than boys. In Pakistan, 30 percent of girls compared to 40 percent of boys under 2 receive complete immunization. ^{7, 12, 14}

LEGISLATION

Legislation on inheritance, land tenure, marriage and divorce discriminates against women.

By 1994, 45 out of 185 member states of the UN had not signed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Amongst countries that have signed, considerable gaps and discrepancies exist between CEDAW provisions, national legislation and customary practice. In many countries in Africa and Asia, constitutional equality can be over-ridden by personal, family, or customary laws which often discriminate against women. In Latin America, the law of *patria potestad* gives men control over wives and families. In some ways, women are still considered legal minors: the legal testimony of women under Islamic law is worth half that of men's; and in many countries men who marry foreign women can pass citizenship to their wives, while women marrying foreign men cannot. ^{8, 11}

Colonial and post-colonial land reforms nearly always put land titles in men's names.

Even where legislation exists to permit women to gain land titles, in practice there are barriers to women claiming these rights. For example, in areas of Kenya where individual tenure prevails, only five percent of women own land. In some regions, for example in parts of Madagascar, women have no legal rights in land. When women do have independent land holdings, they are on average smaller, more distant from dwellings and of lower quality than those of men. ⁴

Women's inheritance rights are restricted by personal laws and customary practice.

In most African countries and in South Asia, inheritance is governed by customary and personal laws which vary by religion and region. These tend to assume that women will be looked after by fathers or husbands. Women are usually legally entitled to inherit some property but not on equal terms with men. For example, Nepali women can only inherit if they are unmarried and over 35 years of age - claims are forfeited if they subsequently marry; Islamic law prescribes a daughter's share of father's property as half that of a son; in Swaziland, women cannot inherit from husbands or fathers; under the Tanzanian Local Customary Law Order, daughters are third in line of inheritance. ^{9, 11}

Marriage and divorce laws and practices contribute to women's dependence on men.

Polygyny is common in parts of Asia and Africa under Muslim, Chinese and Customary laws. New wives are often brought in to provide extra labour. Women's status in the family and access to resources can be heavily dependent on wife-order. Payment of brideprice is widely practiced in Africa, and dowry is common in parts of Asia. Dowry payments encourage the perception that female children are a burden, causing other forms of discrimination, including increasingly limited inheritance rights for women and physical abuse. While dowries can be lavish, they are rarely in the form of productive assets, which are inherited by sons. Divorce laws often provide greater liberties to men than to women. In some countries a wife's adultery is grounds for divorce, while the husband's adultery is not. Under Islamic law, women have rights to divorce, but only men have rights to the *talaq* by which divorce can be declared instantly. ¹

Legal provision for maintenance of ex-wives and children is limited and difficult to enforce.

Where marriages are not formally registered, or where the ex-wife is the 'guilty' party, maintenance claims cannot be enforced, as in many countries in Africa. Customary law rarely acknowledges the concept of maintenance. Under Islamic law, maintenance payments are required during the *iddat* period, during which the woman may not remarry, but may not be enforced subsequently. ^{1, 4}

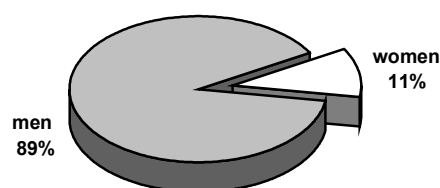
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In many countries, women have only recently been granted the right to vote.

In 11 countries across Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific, equal suffrage was only granted between 1976 and 1991. Women continue to be denied the vote in Kuwait. Certain factors may limit women's ability to exercise their right to vote, although disaggregated figures on the electorate are rarely available. Women's higher illiteracy rate constrains political awareness and effective choice. In three Asian, five African and two Latin American countries (as well as four developed countries), men are able to vote by proxy for female members of their families. Abuse of this provision, however, has only been informally recorded. ^{8, 16}

Overall parliamentary representation of women in developing regions remains low.

Proportion of women in parliament, developing countries, 1992



Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1994

Parliamentary representation of women increased between 1975 and 1987 but women still make up less than four percent of representatives in many countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, with notable exceptions. Worldwide, as in developing countries, women's representation in parliament was about 11 percent in 1992. Quotas of women representatives, where they exist, are often not met. In Africa there are 31 countries where women held no ministerial positions in 1987-8; the same situation prevailed in 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 30 countries in Asia and the Pacific and several developed countries. In nine countries in East Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific, no woman had ever been elected to parliament prior to 1991.^{16, 18} Where women's bureaux or

ministries of women's affairs have been established, they often have second-class status, limited resources and wield little influence over mainstream policy-making. Although women are often prominent in community-based and activist groups, these are generally excluded from policy-making processes.

Democratisation does not guarantee improved representation of women.

Trends towards democratisation and decentralisation, particularly in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, may be presenting opportunities for greater involvement of women in formal politics, but this is by no means automatic. Institutional barriers, socio-cultural factors and lack of time may constrain women's participation. Democratisation in Eastern Europe has led to significant declines in women's representation.

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