THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL CRISES ON WOMEN

Introduction

Tina Wallace

There are many global issues that have an impact on Third World economies and deeply affect the quality of life for their populations. The impact of the growing debt crisis in many countries, of structural adjustment packages, of the declining terms of trade for Third World products, of national and international conflict and war have been devastating, especially for poor people. Their conditions have deteriorated in recent years. Declining standards of health care and education, growing hunger and even famine, and lack of employment opportunities are common experiences in many countries. Many find themselves trying to eke out a precarious living under severe economic conditions and where environmental degradation is widespread.

The readings in this section focus on some of these international issues and explore the ways in which they specifically affect women, and women's relationships with men. The primary reason for analysing the impact on women and on gender relations is to redress the balance: most data and theories about, for example, the impact of debt or famine, have focused on men, and ignored the changes imposed on women's lives and the ways in which relations between women and men are changing under these external pressures. This lack of understanding of the situation of women has led to inappropriate and even damaging development or aid programmes. The analyses and descriptions presented here focus
predominantly on women living in poverty; in the classes that are most vulnerable to war, to cuts in social services, to falling commodity prices, or to exploitation as cheap labour within the international division of labour. How are these women adjusting to changing circumstances and how does this affect their relationships with the state, with the community and with men — both in and outside the household?

These macro-issues affect in a very real way the daily lives of men and women, in both rural and urban areas. For those who work at the grassroots it is important to understand the global pressures and constraints under which people live, and the analyses and descriptions presented here relate directly to the realities at the micro-level of the community, organisations, projects, and households. Peggy Antrobus, in the article which closes this book, states the importance of understanding these connections:

'The analysis should be one which attempts to relate experience at the micro-level of the sector, community, project, or household, to that of macro-economic analysis. A gender analysis of the structural adjustment policies (for example) illustrate the ways in which macro-economic policies affect women's experience at the level of the poorest household. Unless this experience is used to inform macro-economic policies and vice versa no meaningful change can be effected.'

The environment
There is a growing awareness now of some of the appalling ecological consequences of both production and development policies that have been pursued in many parts of the Third World. These issues — like all the other topics discussed in this section — deserve a book to themselves, and indeed Joan Davidson and Irene Dankelman have written a very useful book covering many environmental issues affecting women in the Third World. However, even though the subject can only be touched on briefly here, it is essential to put it firmly on the agenda. The article we have chosen comes from an International Environment meeting for women, organised by the Women's Environmental Network and War on Want, attended by NGO's, activists and academics from all over the world. Chee Yoke Ling highlights the damage caused to the environment by the activities of transnational companies through
deforestation, plantations, and the dumping of waste. She describes how women in particular are affected by these factors. Pollution can cause infertility or birth deformities; women as producers are exploited as cheap labour; and women as community managers have to carry on campaigns to oppose the mistreatment of their environment when the men are away or have been arrested.

However many of the micro-issues relating to the environment are not covered in this article. Women, because of their responsibilities to provide food, to gather fuel and water, and to care for the sick and elderly, often do have valuable knowledge and experience about their environments. This knowledge is often overlooked or ignored by development agencies as well as governments and international agencies because women are so rarely consulted about any of their expertise. These aspects of women's potentially key role in ecological management and conservation are touched on elsewhere in the book — in this section in Ann Whitehead's article where she describes women's crucial role in small-holding agriculture. In Brian Mathew's article on water in Section Four he clearly shows the critical role women have to play in managing and maintaining essential water resources. Other articles in Section Four describe women's role as harvesters of wild crops (Pugansoa), and as herders and waterers of small livestock in arid lands (Watson).

Of course populations under pressure are also users and abusers of the environment, and as people are pushed onto more marginal land, or herded into refugee camps, or forced to farm deteriorating soils they may increasingly use up precious scarce and often non-renewable resources. This aspect of women's potentially negative relationship to the environment has not been covered in this book, but this does not detract from its critical importance and the need to explore this area further.

**Transnational Corporations**

The increasingly global patterns of production, particularly in the fields of, for example, agribusiness, textiles, electronics, and information technology, have created within these industries an international division of labour. The high-technology, capital intensive work tends to be done in the North, with the low technology, labour intensive work carried out in the South. This work can be moved quickly from one country to another to
maximise profits and critically depends on the use of cheap labour. Many countries in the South ‘woo’ Transnational Companies to come to their country with offers of tax benefits and other incentives partly because of their urgent needs to produce for export and to provide local employment.

The development, design, engineering and testing is usually done in Europe or USA while the assembly, labouring jobs and clerical work are done in the South: these relationships are especially seen in the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and plantations of Asia, South East Asia and the Caribbean, although they are also found in Africa and the Middle East. Within these FTZ’s and plantations women are usually the target for the cheap labour. Social and cultural stereotypes, traditions and expectations about the role and status of women are used to justify employing young women on low wages, refusing them access to Unions and denying them security of employment. Health and safety standards are minimal or almost non-existent, and way below those demanded for workers in the North.

‘Thus the payment of low wages to an off-shore assembly workforce and the employment of a low-wage female workforce in the [electronics] industry generally has been a major strategy that has enabled the industry to grow and profit at a phenomenal rate.’ (Hancock p.136.)

This sexual division of labour is not only confined to women in the Third World; women in Europe and the US are also largely confined within the lowest paid and labour intensive sectors of these industries:

‘Thus transnational production in the electronics industry has developed a global division of labour which is made up of a high-technology, predominantly male professional and technical workforce in the US, supported by a labour-intensive, semi-skilled, assembly production workforce almost completely comprised of women workers from the US and to a greater extent women workers from off-shore sites in South East Asia.’ (Hancock p.135.)

Some of the issues surrounding the growing international and sexual division of labour, and the mobility of international capital and its implications for women in the South (in this case the Caribbean) are looked at in the article from the Dominican Republic.
Structural adjustment

Most Third World countries have experienced economic deterioration in the past decade. The causes are many and complex, including particularly the falling prices of primary products produced in the South and purchased by the Northern countries and the rising prices of essential imports; the growing interest that is demanded on the money so freely lent by International Banks during the 1970s; and the increasing expenditure on arms and defence in several countries. However, this book is not the place to explore these causes in any detail; some of the critical issues will be covered in a forthcoming Oxfam publication on trade by Belinda Coote. We focus here on the impact of IMF stabilisation packages and World Bank structural adjustment packages, imposed because of growing debts, on poor people, especially women.

It is now well recognised that these adjustment strategies weigh most heavily on the poor; Diane Elson in her article argues that it is particularly women who are adversely affected in low income households, as employees in the public sector, and as farmers. Women are affected both as producers and as reproducers; and as carers for the children, the sick and the elderly.

Adjustment packages, while opening up markets, often do not enable women to compete effectively, because no assistance is given to alleviate their domestic workloads. Indeed, cuts in public expenditure and welfare spending are often made in the expectation that women will increase their work as providers of health and social services. Thus the increased domestic work imposed by these cuts actually prevents women from taking advantage of any new economic opportunities.

Diane Elson emphasises the acute shortage of disaggregated data showing the differential impact adjustment has on men and women, although research is now under way which shows that different classes and economic groups are affected very differently. This lack of gender specific data is a major obstacle to understanding fully and in detail how women are affected by structural adjustment in different countries; this lack of statistical data on women also limits our knowledge of their situation in relation to many other areas such as agriculture, pastoralism, health needs, etc. Aggregated statistics are the common tools of economic analysis and effectively hide gender inequalities and differences, so Diane Elson (and many others in this book — Watson, Ara Khan, Wallace) argues strongly
for new and gender sensitive ways of measuring women’s involvement, and in this case measuring the impact of structural adjustment on women and men separately. The existing evidence suggests that within the most vulnerable groups it is women who are being the hardest hit, in terms of experiencing both greater poverty and increasingly heavy work loads.

Diane Elson discusses a number of critical issues in relation to women and structural adjustment, which are of relevance to those living and working in the countries most heavily affected by these measures. However, this is a vast area, and those interested in studying the issue in more detail can refer to the report from the Women’s Alternative Economic Summit on Structural Adjustment held in 1990 (forthcoming); and a recent report from the Commonwealth Secretariat, ‘Engendering Adjustment’.

Conflict and war

The lives of many people in many nations are torn apart by wars; people are killed, communities fragmented or destroyed, there is forced migration, and societies undergo temporary or even long-term changes. Women are affected in different ways from men, because of the different gender responsibilities they have. It is usually men who are the fighters and suffer disablement and death through combat, and the women stay behind to feed and maintain the family and community; although, in some liberation struggles, women have also joined the fight and taken on new, military roles during the conflict. In some cases war can open up new areas to women, where they are allowed to take over the work, responsibilities and in some cases the decision making of the absent men. However, while in some cases these changes are accepted and become integrated into the working of the society (as, for example, in the Eritrean and Tigrayan situations), it is more often the case that women’s position in relation to men is maintained unchanged (see Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas on Algeria). Once the men return home, women have to struggle very hard to hold on to their new found skills, responsibilities and wider roles within the community. This is well described in the interview with Myrna Cunningham of Nicaragua. Men usually succeed in taking back social and economic control from the women.

There are other ways in which women are affected by war. When the men leave, it is the women who have to feed and care for the
elderly and children, at a time when the disruption and lack of labour has probably seriously undermined their ability to produce food. Famines and violence often force women to flee their homes and many move to refugee camps. The majority of the world's refugees and displaced people are women and children, and the implications of this are explored in Tina Wallace's paper. In these situations, while women often have to act as household heads, they continue to be viewed by aid agencies as dependents and are not given the support and status they need to carry out all these new duties and responsibilities.

During emergencies, international agencies and governments are often so caught up in the complex and demanding logistics and politics of the immediate situation that they are insensitive to changing gender roles, and the newly emerging needs of women are neglected. While women may be recognised as the main beneficiaries of aid, their right to be involved in planning and decision making is not; with serious consequences for the treatment of refugees.

The refugee women described in Tina Wallace's article stress the ways in which women themselves work to overcome their disadvantage and their subordinate position. There is a vital need for information about what happens to women in war and as refugees — what are their survival strategies; how are their gender relations changed and how can any positive changes be retained; what are their needs in terms of health, nutrition, education, skills training, and employment; and what support do they require to meet those needs? Women are finding ways to articulate what is happening to them, and to link their experiences and demands to those of other women and disadvantaged groups in order to make their voice heard. In this they want support from the international agencies.

The decline in the productive base, growing hunger and impoverishment

Government and international development policies, the focus on cash crops to the detriment of food crops, and the rural-urban migration of labour are all contributory factors to the decline in food production in many parts of the world, especially sub-Saharan Africa. In her article, Ann Whitehead looks at the changing nature of agricultural production. Men and women have often played very
separate roles in agricultural production and have been responsible for meeting different needs within the household. In the past, women and men in Africa, for example, have both farmed for subsistence, and for income, which is usually controlled by them separately. However, as the economic situation has deteriorated, with worsening terms of trade and increasing scarcity of land, new pressures have been placed on farming relations; and these have been exacerbated by aid and government policies. The emphasis on commercial agriculture has meant that women have found it increasingly difficult to secure access to the scarce resources of land, labour and agricultural inputs they need to maintain their role as independent farmers growing food crops. In addition, their labour has become very important for their husband’s cash crop production. This labour is seldom rewarded and so women find they have less income. Ann Whitehead argues that this can and does lead to increasing conflict between men and women, and that development projects which assume that women’s labour is freely available to men exacerbate this conflict and further erode women’s control over key resources.

Women’s growing loss of control over independent farming makes them particularly vulnerable in times of crisis, such as war or famine. Ann Whitehead argues that the number of female-headed households increases during times of stress such as food crisis or famine, and that when recovery comes, these women and children do not regain reasonable levels of income and welfare. Famines and food insecurity are contributing to the development of an extremely poor female stratum in Africa. What this article demonstrates is the need to understand women’s roles and responsibilities in the production of food and income (see also the articles by Clare Oxby and Cathy Watson in Section Four); how these are changing with the transformation of rural economies; and how so many past and present policies actually make the situation worse for women.

**Concluding comments**

In this section, we bring together the work of academics, NGO staff and partners to focus attention on some of the different macro-economic, social and political factors that are affecting — and impoverishing — Third World countries. Many of these factors are inter-related, and have significant and distinct implications in each country for the lives of women, especially poor women. These
complex factors need to be recognised, researched using methods which separate out women and men, and understood by those involved in development work, in whatever capacity.

'We must recognise the links not only between the fate of Third World women, and the politics pursued by the developed countries... there is after all a connection between poverty and injustice and debt, drugs, militarism, food insufficiency, population pressure, and environmental degradation.'
(Antrobus, postcript to this book.)

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WOMEN, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE

CHEE YOKE LING

As a country rich in natural resources with a population of 16.5 million people, Malaysia is often regarded as having an impressive record in terms of development. The country was drawn into the international market place when it was a British colony, producing the greatest quantity of natural rubber in the world.

Since independence in 1957 economic growth has intensified, leading to the exploitation of timber, petroleum and tin. Large tracts of forest have been cleared and much arable land turned to the mono-cultivation of palm oil and rubber. Industrialisation has been embarked on enthusiastically, geared towards the export market.

In the process, environmental protection and resource conservation have been largely made subservient to material growth. In the agricultural sector the introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice, oil palm and rubber has increased the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides. Land control and ownership has shifted from small farmers to large land holders, be they local individuals, corporations (local and foreign) or government agencies.

Cash crop production rapidly excluded women’s usufructuary rights to cultivate and control land for food production. The cash economy and new technologies placed men at the centre, marginalising the role of women in the traditional rural economy, reducing women to a role of dependence.

Encouraged by government policies to provide cheap labour for factories, many women have drifted to the industrial sector. Most of them end up in low-paid jobs and are exposed to hazardous and stressful conditions, damaging to health.

In the cash crop sector, thousands of Indians were brought from India to work in British Malayan plantations at the turn of the century. They came from the lowest and most oppressed castes in the Indian society and the oppressive social and economic situation of women was carried over to the plantations, where it still persists.
The majority of the plantation workers exposed to hazardous conditions, particularly with respect to the use of toxic pesticides and herbicides, are women.

The following are three case studies showing the impact of economic growth on the environment and women.

**Poisoning of women workers in the plantations**

The agricultural sector is a major revenue earner in the Malaysian economy. Malaysia is presently a leading world exporter of palm oil and rubber. The implementation of large-scale cash crop plantation was started in British colonial days and extensively expanded in the past 25 years. This has resulted in the wide and rampant use of chemical pesticides and herbicides for weed control to increase yield, which has created an adverse impact on the environment and workers’ safety. Up to 80 per cent of herbicide sprayers in the plantations are women. They have to spray paraquat, a highly toxic chemical which has been responsible for more poisonings than any other weed killer. Many of the cases result in death. Less than a teaspoonful of concentrated paraquat is likely to be lethal if swallowed.

Exposure to paraquat over a period of time can cause damage to the lungs, heart, kidneys, adrenal glands, central nervous system, liver, skeletal muscle and spleen. Paraquat can be absorbed by the skin in amounts leading to toxic effects. There is no known antidote to counter the poison once it enters the body.

Paraquat has been banned or heavily restricted in its use in many countries, but is still actively encouraged by the government in Malaysia. Almost all plantations use paraquat. Each day for eight hours women ranging from their teens to their fifties are exposed to this highly toxic chemical. The women are normally not provided with proper equipment to handle the chemical when they dilute it, nor are they provided with protective clothing.

Women who dilute the chemical are then required to shoulder it in containers strung on a pole to be distributed to the sprayers at different points on the plantation. Very often water from the streams and monsoon drains are used for dilution and the washing of containers, which has resulted in contamination of the streams.

The women themselves are often splashed with the paraquat solution as they carry the half-exposed containers to and fro about 20 times a day. The sprayers who receive the paraquat solution then
pour it into pumps which weigh as much as 25kg each. They are seldom provided with protective clothing. Pregnant women are sometimes also required to carry a pump on their back to spray paraquat. Cases of miscarriage are therefore on the increase.

Female plantation workers are largely uninformed of the dangers inherent in the chemical which they use so regularly. They therefore do not understand the toxicity of paraquat. Even where warnings and instructions are printed on the label, these are inadequate or useless since most of the women are illiterate.

For these women their long and hazardous work as income earners is further burdened by household work and caring for the family. Since the plantation workers are one of the most exploited and neglected groups in the country, poverty and frustration have driven the male workers to alcoholism, wife and child battering. Thus the women suffer immense stress, hardships and rapidly deteriorating health.

The rapid expansion of the cash crop economy which is hailed as a ‘development success story’ has plunged thousands of women into a poisonous trap. The few who are aware and feel confident enough to protest by refusing to carry out such hazardous jobs are intimidated. In one case, a young woman who asserted her right not to be forced to perform a dangerous task (i.e. spray toxic paraquat) was transferred to an even more remote part of the plantation. For wages of less than £2 a day, the women sprayers in the plantation sector are exposed to poisoning and exploitation.

In 1985 the ‘Campaign to Ban Paraquat’ was launched by Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia). Hundreds of women demonstrated peacefully before the Deputy Minister of Health, but many thousands are still unaware of their rights. Education to build awareness and confidence is thus of primary importance. Workshops and discussions are being conducted all over the country and plantation owners, including transnational companies and government agencies, are being pressurised to meet the demands of the workers. Ongoing research on the impact of pesticides on water and soil is being carried out to strengthen the case for the phasing out of toxic chemicals, particularly paraquat.

**Women against radioactivity**

In 1982, in a little town called Bukit Merah, a Japanese-Malaysian joint venture, Asian Rare Earth (ARE) began its operations of
processing monazite to produce yttrium, a rare earth used in the electronics industry. The process produces thorium hydroxide, a radioactive waste which can remain hazardous for ten billion years.

Thousands of tonnes of thorium were dumped in plastic bags and old drums in the open and in ponds which flowed into a river. Some were even used as fertiliser by people unaware of the danger. A court order was obtained in October 1985, stopping ARE from operating until adequate safety measures were taken to prevent radioactivity escaping from the factory. Unfortunately in 1987 the factory resumed its operations after obtaining a licence from the newly-established Atomic Energy Licensing Board.

Thousands of residents affected by the indiscriminate dumping of radioactive waste walked six miles every day to the Court when the hearing started in 1987. One of the women, a 70-year-old grandmother, said:

'T'm walking here twelve miles every day to and from the court to show how serious and concerned we are. It's my grandchildren's lives I am fighting for.'

Although cancer is the worst risk, radiation can also damage the skin, cause rashes, and damage the bone marrow, while children can become mentally handicapped and deformed. The factory also emitted radon gas which can cause lung cancer.

Medical evidence that came to light during the first part of the court case revealed horrifying facts. Women under 30 years old and in good health in Bukit Merah were found to have suffered an abnormally high rate of miscarriages, neonatal and perinatal deaths between 1982 and 1986. The rate of problems associated with pregnancy and childbirth was 7.5 per cent in Bukit Merah compared to the national average of 1.8 per cent.

Blood tests were also carried out on children to identify the level of lead. The wastes produced by ARE comprised lead and radioactive thorium hydroxide in almost equal proportions. Since it was difficult and expensive to test for the presence of thorium hydroxide, the presence of lead was used as an indicator. Tests conducted by Dr Rosalie Bertell, a renowned scientist in the field of low-level radiation and public health, revealed that 100 per cent of the 60 children tested had higher than normal lead levels. A year later levels were still on the increase.
A general health survey of 260 children revealed that they were more affected by common ailments (running nose, cough, swelling in the neck region and rashes) than children on a less nutritious diet. Evidence was strong that the radiation was affecting the immune and reproductive systems in the affected population.

The women and men who stand vigil during each part of the court case (which is still unfinished) are strong in their struggle to close down the ARE factory. The women have taken a leadership role since late 1987 when some of the male leaders were arrested under the Internal Security Act, which permits detention without trial for an indefinite period. The violation of their bodies and their children's health in the name of development is unacceptable to these women.

Industrial projects which fail to take into account the impact on human health and the environment cannot be justified. Mitsubishi Corporation (the Japanese partner) were forced to close down a similar plant in Japan when they failed to comply with environmental standards in their own country. Yet they have no compunction in dumping such hazardous industries on developing countries in the pursuit of profit.

The setting up of hazardous industries in the midst of long-established low-income residential areas is common. The decisions to locate these operations do not involve public consultation. The environmental and health impact is grossly neglected.

**Deforestation for timber wealth**

In March 1987, thousands of indigenous people in Sarawak, Malaysia, formed human barricades across logging roads in the deep interior of the tropical rainforest. For more than 20 years, their forest has been ripped apart for logs which are predominantly exported to Japan. Soil erosion is widespread and farmlands being damaged, resulting in dwindling food resources; water supplies are becoming polluted and unfit for drinking, and diseases are on the increase. In a desperate attempt to stop the destruction of their ancestral lands and forests, after years of unsuccessful appeals and petitions to the government, the people of the area organised simultaneous blockades.

The Penan community are the worst affected because they are nomadic hunters and gatherers, and therefore rely solely on the forest. Their struggle is crucial because 2.8 million hectares had been
logged between 1963 and 1985, and at the end of 1984 another 5.8 million hectares were licensed out for logging. Most of the timber license-holders are politicians, their friends and families.

For thousands of years the Penan have lived in harmony with their environment, harvesting and not destroying the forest which sustains their survival. This is a society where women and men participate equally in maintaining the communal life in the forest. They collect food, herbs and materials to make their shelters and baskets. The destruction of their forest to feed the greed of timber tycoons, businesses and consumers leaves them no choice but to physically stop the logging. According to one Penan woman: 'We'll stay here until they listen to us. We want them to leave our land. That forest is our source of survival. Without the forest we are all dead.'

Entire villages walked for days across the mountains to the logging roads which traverse their lands. While the men set up wooden fences and built rest shelters, the women wove leaves for roof thatch and organised food supplies. Breastfeeding mothers, old women, young children and men stood in vigil, stopping logging operations for almost seven months. The police and army forcibly dismantled the blockades and arrested some of the men. Blockades were set up again at the end of 1988, and in early January 1989, more than 100 Penan men were arrested under a newly-created offence designed to criminalise the Penans’ battle for their legitimate land rights. The women take over the responsibilities of seeking food and water supplies. Many have to stand by helplessly while their children have less and less to eat and polluted water causes diseases to increase.

The profiteers are local timber tycoons and Japanese timber traders. The beneficiaries are urban consumers who utilise tropical hardwoods and paper products, often wastefully, with no thought that each paper bag or crate or piece of furniture which is used and thrown away is the product of a violation of both human rights and the environment. Official Japanese aid is given for the construction of access roads and bridges to facilitate logging in the interior areas.

The struggle of the Penan to maintain their culture and way of life is dismissed as ‘primitive’. They are urged to join the mainstream and be ‘developed’. But the reality is that no alternative is offered for the deprivation of their forest resources. Where resettlement has taken place in other native communities, the effects
have been negative, leading to a breakdown in the community itself and a dependency on the cash economy.

Meanwhile arrests and intimidations continue but the Penan refuse to give up. Blockades are planned again for March/April 1989. As the forest dwindles, the Penan have to walk for days to seek food and clean water. The land is their life. 'If we don't do something now to protect the little that is left, there will be nothing for our children. Until we die we will block this road.'

Conclusion

Exploitation of natural resources for development has led to depletion and further environmental damage, as seen in the case of the Sarawak rainforest. This has led to human suffering and loss. The aid needed by communities such as the Penan is a restoration of their rights to the forest, the attainment of their right to be consulted in any plan which is supposed to benefit them, and the right to determine how their cultures and values should be maintained. The wealth of their knowledge on how to live in harmony with nature is a gift yet to be appreciated by modern society. The Penan have 'aid' for the rest of us.

For the women of Bukit Merah who, like many thousands of others, find their health and safety (and that of their families) jeopardised by industries beyond their control, the aid they need is the abolishing of double standards when hazardous industries and technologies are dumped on developing countries with (often) the collusion of local governments. The reorientation of development from pure economic growth to one of ecological advancement is urgently needed. Be it a grant, a loan or an investment, aid must pass the environmental and social audit too, and not merely the economic consideration.

Modern agriculture which is market and cash oriented has also become a lucrative profit source for pesticide and fertiliser industries. While agribusiness, plantation owners and the traders and manufacturers of final products record annual profits, thousands of women pay with their health and their very lives. The aid they want is assistance to create awareness and strengthen their power to resist and reject a working environment which slowly poisons them.
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FREE TRADE ZONES AND WOMEN WORKERS

MARIVI ARREGUI AND CLARA BAEZ

Free Trade Zones (FTZs) are, as their name suggests, opportunities for transnational companies to take advantage of a tax-free situation afforded by the host government, along with subsidised utilities. All international studies on FTZs report that most of the manual labour they use is carried out by women. This tendency is so strong that it is seen even in countries whose ideology is opposed to women working outside the home. The real motive for the predominance of women in these industries has nothing to do with the greater manual dexterity of women, supposed to make them more suitable for the clothing and electronic industries which predominate in FTZs. The great attraction of female labour is that, in all areas of the world and throughout history, it is usually cheaper than that of men.

The role of women in the clothing industry

The exploitation of women workers is not a contemporary phenomenon. Even in the first stages of the development of industrial capitalism, the accumulation of capital was made possible in part by the exploitation of the most vulnerable section of the workforce: women and children, who made up about 60 per cent of the total workforce at the time.

The history of the clothing industry in the United States falls into three phases. In the first phase, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the textile industry of New England employed largely native labour; mostly young white women recruited in the country from rural families, who generally gave up work on marriage. Their working conditions were relatively good, so that their labour was expensive for the textile factory owners.

In the second phase, the local labour force was replaced by immigrants from Europe. Immigrant women arriving in the United States had great need of work and were prepared to accept poor working conditions. They did not object to working after marriage and were even willing to do piece-work at home for very low wages.
in order to combine paid work with their family responsibilities. As these women became americanised, and the reform movements of the early twentieth century attempted to improve working conditions for women, their labour became more expensive. However, further immigrants, this time from the Third World, provided the clothing industry with cheap labour. These women could not easily obtain other types of work because of language difficulties and poor education.

In the third phase, the clothing industry moved to the countries of the Third World, especially Asia and the Caribbean, where there is high unemployment and rapid population growth, and set up factories in the FTZs, producing for export. This third phase in the development of the industry has intensified the dependence of Third World countries on powerful capitalist countries such as the United States, because foreign companies, generally multinationals, control the markets.

The range of work in the clothing industry covers monotonous and repetitive tasks as well as work requiring great skill. The internationalisation of the production process has led to work which requires more skilled labour, such as the cutting of material (traditionallly performed by men), being carried out exclusively in the United States, while less skilled work, such as sewing, has been transferred to the Third World. Now, low skilled tasks are performed by a new proletariat created by the new international division of labour: workers in the FTZs.

**Sexual differentiation in the labour market**

Studies of employment in the manufacturing industry show that sexual discrimination is the true cause of the lower rates of pay for women. A study on Brazilian business examines why one group of workers, who had been carefully selected and tried out in the job over several months, were paid less than others who had been unconditionally recruited, without having any qualifications or previous experience. The latter were men, the former were women. Another study shows how, in a large organisation, women all remained in jobs at a lower level than their qualifications and experience would merit. A third study, carried out in Taiwan, showed that being married had a positive effect on the salaries of men while it had a negative effect on those of women. The reason seemed to be that married women were expected to take more time
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off work after marriage but men were thought to be more likely to turn up regularly and be effective workers. However, the few studies there are comparing absenteeism among men and women show there is little difference, and often female absenteeism is lower.

The strategies used by employers to benefit from women’s lower pay include the following:

whole aspects of production are confined to one sex or the other, with different salary levels, which are always lower in the areas where women are employed;

women and men work on the same aspect of production, but men always have jobs further up the hierarchy and so are paid more;

women and men perform the same tasks, but the women are paid less because their salary is considered as supplementary to that of a man, the latter being seen as the main family support.

Another aspect of sexual differentiation in the labour market reviewed by Joekes (1985) is that women tend to have a lower level of education than men. However, this position needs to be qualified, since the educational gulf between the sexes is diminishing and the educational advances won by women in the last three decades are considerable. It would be better to refer to an inadequate ‘supply’ of qualifications for women, generally limited to a sexually stereotyped range of subjects, which often puts them at a disadvantage in competing against men for jobs in industry. It is ultimately the gender of the worker which explains the differences in salary, which in turn determine the pattern of a segmented labour market, supported by the discriminatory gender relations of women in all social spheres (Beneria, 1985).

Involvement of women in Free Trade Zones in the Dominican Republic

In the Dominican Republic, women have been traditionally less involved in industrial work, which was largely carried out by men. Women’s labour was concentrated in services, especially domestic labour. Those women who did obtain industrial work were employed mostly in food and clothing factories, where work was most poorly paid.
The creation and growth of the FTZs has seen a change take place, to the point where, currently, this sector has become the main employer of women's labour in the cities after domestic service (Duarte et al, 1989). According to a study carried out by Joekes in 1986, more than 70 per cent of the workforce employed in the FTZs are women. The percentage of women workers varies in different industries, with electronics the highest at 85 per cent, clothing and textiles 74 per cent, shoes 50 per cent and tobacco 30 per cent.

It is estimated that the number of men employed has increased recently (Aleman, 1989), possibly under pressure from growing male unemployment due to the decline of industries such as sugar refining. Even so, women remain in the majority.

Who are the women employed in the Dominican FTZs and what are their working conditions like? There is little up to date information to answer this question. The investigations which gathered primary data on these workers date from 1981, when the only FTZs existing in the Dominican Republic were at La Romana, San Pedro and Santiago. However, we will attempt to present a picture of these workers from this basic information, supplemented by visits to the FTZs, informal interviews with workers (or ex-workers) and unionists carried out by CONSA.

Sociodemographic characteristics
The numerous studies which have been carried out on FTZs in the rest of the world report certain common findings: women who work in FTZs are young and single, they have a minimal level of education, they have no previous experience of paid work and they do not stay in the job for very long. The data obtained in the Dominican Republic agree generally with these trends, but they differ in certain respects.

Age
Dominican women working in FTZs are generally younger than the workers employed in national industry, but older than women workers in FTZs in other countries, especially in Asia. About 70 per cent of Dominican women working in the FTZs are between 20 and 35 years old, with an average age of 26.9. This contrasts with the situation in Asia, where 85 per cent of women FTZ workers are less than 25 years old.
Marital status
Women workers in the FTZs in the Dominican Republic differ from those of other countries in that they are less likely to be single. Studies carried out throughout national industry, as well as FTZs, show that nearly half of female workers are married or cohabiting. Approximately 25 per cent are separated or widows and the rest are single. Some employers may prefer married workers because they have family responsibilities, need more money and are therefore likely to be reliable workers and to accept less favourable working conditions; but this is not universal, and some women conceal their marital status when seeking employment. Another explanation for the predominance of married women in industry in the Dominican Republic is that women marry very early, the average age at first marriage being 17. Most of the available female workforce in the country is married; so employers’ preferences are of less significance.

Level of education
Studies on FTZ workers in other parts of the world show that their level of education is generally lower than in national industry. In the Dominican Republic, women working in FTZs have a higher level of education than most women in the country, although it is lower than the average in national industry. Level of education is one of the criteria used by employers. However, workers perform tasks, learnt in two or three months of employment, which do not bear any relation to their qualifications. Not using their previous training causes these women to be, in effect, dequalified; what Duarte and Corten call 'educational proletarianisation'.

Children
The majority of workers in the FTZs have children (84 per cent in Duarte and Corten’s survey and 63 per cent according to Centro de Investigacion y Accion femenina (CIPAF)). A significant percentage of these women are family heads (31.5 per cent in Duarte and Corten’s survey and 38 per cent in the CIPAF survey). Some of the working mothers have to leave their children with their parents’ family. Childcare, given the absence of creche facilities, is a problem or a constant worry for most women working in the FTZs.
Free Trade Zones and women workers

Working conditions

Studies carried out in FTZs in other countries all confirm that in general the work done is monotonous and repetitive, and is characterised by the intense pace of production, with strong work discipline. It does not qualify women for other better paid jobs or lead on to them. The data for the Dominican Republic confirm these findings.

Training

Workers usually spend from one to three months in training, although this training period can sometimes be extended to as much as six months. In reality, the work is simple and does not take very much time to learn; what the women have to learn is the pace of work and its intensity. However, while a worker is in training she receives half the normal salary, so some employers prolong this period unnecessarily.

Salaries

When the FTZs first set up in the Dominican Republic, companies paid 80 per cent of the official minimum salary. They lost this concession in 1979 and since then, have had to pay the minimum salary. The only ways in which the majority of workers can increase their pay is to meet production quotas, for which an additional amount of money is usually (but not always) paid, and to take on overtime. This effort to increase their salary is made at the cost of damaging their health and shortening the period of their active life. However, salaries in FTZs are higher than those paid in domestic service, agriculture or informal sector work. While the legal minimum salary is paid in the FTZs, this requirement is frequently not met in other labour sectors.

Labour rotation

Studies carried out in the Dominican Republic, as in other parts of the world, report a high rate of labour rotation in the FTZs; almost half of FTZ workers interviewed by CIPAF had been working in the firm for less than two years. Various factors have been put forward as causes of this phenomenon. One reason may be the difficulty of fitting in the reproductive role with the exigencies of work. Another factor is that the work discipline and the intensity of labour often wear women out to such an extent that they often leave work or are dismissed.
A study in the electronics industry shows that women who have worked with a microscope for several years develop eyesight problems which lead to their dismissal. Sometimes workers are dismissed without any definite reason. In La Romana, according to our information, many workers have been dismissed on the grounds that they have 'already worked five years for the company'. But women themselves sometimes move companies, seeking those in which work conditions are less oppressive.

Labour rotation is fairly characteristic of FTZs. It is the means used by these industries to renew the workforce when their physical deterioration begins to affect the volume of production.

**Working environment**
The majority of FTZ firms establish rules and discipline which enable them to obtain the greatest productivity from the workforce. This discipline takes the form of the establishment of individual and collective production quotas, denying time off for health reasons, often limiting the frequency with which women may go to the lavatory, making overtime obligatory, and asking for pregnancy tests when new workers are being recruited. The pettiness of some managers is such that in several factories in San Pedro, women had to go on strike to demand clean toilets. It was beyond the efforts of the workers to get fans installed to relieve the unbearable heat of certain sections of the factory. Music played at high volume is another characteristic of the work environment in many of these factories.

**Social perspectives**
The growth of FTZs has been so rapid that the social and economic impact on the lives of the workers is hard to measure. But there are certain obvious consequences which create problems, particularly for women, and raise many questions for the future.

The tendency for FTZs to employ women rather than men has implications for the gender pattern of industrial employment and, as industries which have traditionally employed men contract, there has been a rise in male unemployment. Sugar refineries and plantations in the Dominican Republic have closed down and been replaced by FTZs, leaving many men without work. Although there has been a tendency, under social and government pressure, for FTZs to increase the number of male workers, the high degree of
industrial competitiveness means that women will be preferred because of their lower rates of pay.

It is likely that sooner or later an organisation for FTZ workers will be created in the Dominican Republic. The possible integration of a significant number of women into the union movement could bring about profound changes in the nature of workers' organisations and political parties. It remains to be seen whether existing unions will join the struggle for general and specific improvements in the lot of women working in FTZs.

If the tendency for women rather than men to be in paid employment continues, this could bring about far-reaching changes in family relationships. Will men assume more responsibility for domestic tasks and the care and education of children? The alternative is for women to become even more overburdened. Another possibility is that the economic independence of women workers in FTZs may result in a large increase in the number of female heads of households.

Children could also be affected by their mothers' working in FTZs. The stressful and exhausting working conditions in FTZs could have serious long-term effects on the physical and mental health of women, and so on their pregnancies and their ability to care for their children. The lack of adequate alternative childcare provision for working mothers could result in increases in levels of child malnutrition and the number of accidental injuries to children.

Female patterns of employment are likely to change, and already there are signs of a reduction in the number of women entering domestic service, and an increase in salaries. This trend could in turn affect the lives of middle class women, making it more difficult for them to work outside the home.

The consequences of the development of FTZs may be profound, not only for the women who work in them but for social relations in society as a whole.

(This is taken from a report prepared for Oxfam by Consultoras Asociadas S.A.(CONSA))

References


The last decade has been marked by a contrast between rising awareness of the importance of women’s contribution to the economy and continued deterioration of the world economy. Women’s Bureaux and women’s groups across the world have campaigned for proper recognition of women’s work both as producers of goods and services, and as reproducers of human resources; and for women to have better access to the resources they require to improve their productivity. There has been some success in opening up new activities to women and increasing their incomes through special training programmes, through projects with women’s components, or projects specifically directed to women. Much of the energy in developing countries has been directed towards women’s projects, often in partnership with aid agency officials who have special responsibility for women and development. In market economy developed countries, much of the emphasis has been on introducing new equal opportunities legislation and enabling women to fight their cases through the courts.

But more important for women than either projects or legislation is the general condition of the economy. Low rates of growth of output, exports and employment undermine all these efforts. The 1980s have seen not just low rates of growth, but absolute declines in economic well-being in many areas.

It is therefore very important that policy makers concerned with the well-being of women should develop the capacity to analyse the implications of global economic deterioration for women, and to assist in the formulation of policies to cope with that deterioration.

**Conceptual tools: gender bias in economic analysis**

Macro-economic trends and policies are usually presented in a language which appears to be gender neutral: no specific mention is made of gender or of the sexual division of labour. The focus of
attention is on the gross national product; on imports, exports and the balance of payments; on efficiency and productivity.

However, this apparent gender-neutrality hides a deep gender bias in the analysis and policy formulation. The economy is defined principally in terms of marketed goods and services, with some allowance made for subsistence crop production in developing countries. The work of caring for children, of gathering fuel and water, processing food, preparing meals, keeping the house clean, nursing the sick, managing the household, is excluded from the economy. It is, of course, this work which largely falls on the shoulders of women, even in the most developed countries. By not considering this work or the resources it requires, macro-economic analysis and policy have a built-in conceptual bias against women.

**The economy and human resources**

This conceptual bias has important practical consequences. Macro-economic policy assumes that the process of raising children and caring for members of the labour force carried out by women unpaid will continue regardless of the way in which resources are re-allocated. Women’s unpaid labour is implicitly regarded as elastic — able to stretch to make up any shortfall in other resources.

Now it is true that the production of human resources is different from the production of any other kind of resource. It does not respond to economic signals in the same way: if the price of a crop falls far enough, it may be uprooted or left to rot; if there is insufficient demand for a manufactured good, the factory is closed and the machinery mothballed, sold off, or scrapped. But if the demand for labour falls, mothers do not ‘scrap’ their children or leave them to rot untended.

However, women’s unpaid labour is not infinitely elastic — breaking point may be reached, and women’s capacity to reproduce and maintain human resources may collapse. Even if breaking point is not reached, the success of the macro-economic policy in achieving its goals may be won at the cost of a longer and harder working day for many women. This cost will be invisible to the policy makers because it is unpaid time. But the cost will be revealed in statistics on the health and nutritional status of such women. What economists regard as ‘increased efficiency’ may instead be a shifting of the costs from the paid economy to the unpaid economy. For instance, a reduction in the time patients
spend in hospital may seem to be an increase in the efficiency of the hospital; the money costs of the hospital per patient fall but the unpaid work of women in the household rises. This is not a genuine increase in efficiency; it is simply a transfer of costs from the hospital to the home.

In considering policy responses to global economic deterioration, we need to ask: does this policy work by increasing the amount of unpaid labour women have to do?

**Adjustment and the 'magic of the market'**

Though the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stabilisation programmes focus primarily on cutting demand, and World Bank structural adjustment programmes focus on boosting supply and increasing productivity, they do share an emphasis on reducing the role of the state, and increasing the role of the market in resource allocation. Both institutions hold the view that a major reason for poor economic performance is distortions in resource allocation. These distortions are caused, they say, by government policy e.g. by over-expansion of the public sector and by the use of direct controls and subsidies. A major element of both types of programme is the removal of direct controls and subsidies and a reduction in the role of the public sector.

IMF stabilisation programmes typically consist of deflation, devaluation and decontrol. Public expenditure is cut, including expenditure on social services and food subsidies. Controls over imports and foreign exchange are loosened. The exchange rate may even be determined by a weekly auction of foreign exchange rather than being fixed by the central bank.

World Bank structural adjustment programmes improve the incentives for private sector producers (particularly of exports) through changes in prices, tariffs and other taxes, subsidies and interest rates; and by reducing the resources allocated to the public sector to make more resources available to the private sector.

The thinking that underlies IMF and World Bank adjustment programmes is shared by governments of some important donor countries. President Reagan spoke of the 'magic of the market' and the UK government has made some aid conditional upon agreement of structural adjustment programmes with the World Bank.
Women, the market and the state

The relation between women, the market and the state is complex. The state does not always operate in the interests of women, and the market does not always operate against the interests of women.

The state frequently plays a major role in perpetuating social, economic and ideological processes that subordinate women. It frequently treats women as dependents of men in legal and administrative procedures, and upholds the patriarchal family in which women do not have the same access to resources as men. Examples of public sector projects and programmes which ignore the needs of women as producers, and direct resources towards men, abound.

The market appears to treat women as individuals in their own right. If women can sell their labour or their products and get a cash income of their own, this lessens their economic dependence upon men, increases their economic value, and may increase their bargaining power within the household. Access to an income of their own tends to be highly valued by women, not only for what it buys, but also for the greater dignity it brings.

However, while women have to carry the double burden of unpaid work in the home, as well as paid work producing goods and services, they are unable to compete with men on equal terms. Equal pay and equal opportunities legislation, and removing the ‘traditional’ barriers to women working outside the home, cannot by themselves free women from domestic burdens and expectations. Access to markets has benefits for women, but the benefits are always limited because raising children and caring for family members is structured by unequal gender relations, and cannot be directly and immediately responsive to market signals.

Women with high incomes can reduce their relative disadvantage in the market by buying substitutes for their unpaid work — employing cleaners, maids, nannies and cooks — but this still leaves them with the responsibility for household management.

If most women are to gain from access to markets, they also need access to public sector services, such as water supplies, electricity, waste disposal facilities, public transport, health care and education, to lighten the burden of their unpaid work and enable them to acquire the skills they need to enter the market.

This suggests that most women have an interest not so much in reducing the role of the state and increasing the role of the market,
as in restructuring both the public sector and the private sector to make them more responsive to women's needs as producers and reproducers.

It is necessary to distinguish different activities within both the public sector and the private sector. In the public sector, we need to distinguish between social services; transport and energy; police, the legal system and armed forces; and state-owned factories, farms and marketing and distribution facilities — often called parastatals. Then within each category we need to examine exactly what is being supplied (primary health care or open heart surgery, for example) and to identify who is benefiting from these activities. We need to examine the relationship between the producers and the users of public sector goods and services. How responsive are producers to the needs of users? What mechanisms are there for users to influence the allocation of resources in the public sector? The structural adjustment required in the public sector may not be a reduction in expenditure, but a change in priorities. The mobilisation and organisation of women who use public sector services may be a way to achieve this.

The private sector needs separating into the formal and the informal sector; foreign and locally owned firms; large and small; those which employ wage labour and family labour; joint-stock companies and co-operatives; farming, trading and manufacturing; activities directed by women and activities directed by men. If greater reliance is to be placed on private enterprise — we need to ask whose enterprise? The enterprise of the woman farming or trading on her own account, or the enterprise of agribusiness and merchants with monopoly power? The enterprise of a women's co-operative or the enterprise of a multinational corporation? The mobilisation of women’s enterprise to provide a decent income and a basis for sustained economic growth requires support from the state, particularly in the provision of credit and training, and in services that free women from domestic duties.

The impact of adjustment on women: a framework for analysis

The process of adjustment affects households in the following ways: changes in incomes, through changes in wages and the level of employment for employees, and through changes in product
prices and product demand for the self-employed;
changes in prices of important purchases, especially food;
changes in the levels and composition of public expenditure, particularly those in the social sector, including possible introduction or increase of user charges for services;
changes in working conditions, through changes in hours of work, intensity of work, job security, fringe benefits and legal status; this applies to unpaid work as well as paid work.

These changes will not affect all households in the same way: some will lose and some will gain. Neither will these changes affect all members of households in the same way. Distribution of resources within households, as well as between households, must be taken into account. When households have to reduce food consumption because of rising prices and falling incomes, available evidence suggests it is very likely that the consumption of women and girls will be reduced by more than that of men and boys. If charges are introduced or increased for education and health services, there is a strong possibility that the access of girls will be reduced. When attempts are made to compensate for reductions in purchased resources by increases in unpaid labour (e.g. buying cheaper food that requires more preparation time), it is likely to be women who bear the main burden.

Available research shows that neither joint decision making nor equal sharing of resources within households is common. The standard of living of wives can be lower than that of husbands; and that of girls lower than boys. Nevertheless, it is generally women who have the responsibility for seeing that members of the household are fed, clothed and cared for, and their obligation to meet children's needs is generally regarded as stronger than men's. Men's obligation is limited to providing some of the cash or productive assets required. Women, then, must meet their families' needs by 'stretching' the husband's cash contribution with 'good housekeeping', or by earning a wage income, or producing food or clothing themselves, or engaging in barter and petty trade. It is women who must devise survival strategies when household incomes fall and prices rise.

**Changes in income**

Many adjustment programmes include limitations or complete
freezes on wage and salary rises in the public sector. Employment in the public sector may be frozen or reduced. Because urban formal sector employees are likely to face adverse changes in their incomes there will be a knock-on effect in the informal sector which supplies goods and services to formal sector employees.

Women public sector employees will be adversely affected. The public sector, rather than the private sector, has hitherto provided most of the professional and managerial urban jobs for women, often with a high degree of security. The best career opportunities for educated women in many countries have been in the public sector. This is often no longer the case: for example, in Jamaica, nurses and teachers are leaving the public sector because of the low levels of pay. Professional women remaining in the public service have been driven to doing extra jobs at night in the informal sector, such as running snack shops.

One category of employment that has expanded for women in some countries is work in export-oriented, labour intensive manufacturing. For example, Sri Lanka and Jamaica have set up Free Trade Zones (FTZs) as part of their adjustment strategy. These employ women in garment production. Wages for women in FTZs do tend to be higher than the average for comparable work outside the zones, so employers in the zones have no difficulty in recruiting women to work for them. But workers in FTZs tend to enjoy fewer rights than workers in the private formal sector factories outside the zones.

On the whole, the incomes and the quality of job opportunities available to women in urban areas have probably deteriorated, though more detailed information on this is required.

In the rural areas, some groups have enjoyed increases in incomes as a result of higher prices for producers of marketed crops. For instance, Ghana increased cocoa prices by more than seven times between 1982-3 and 1986-7 as part of a major World Bank supported programme to rehabilitate the cocoa industry. In most sub-Saharan countries, producer prices for food crops have risen substantially since 1980, mainly as a result of dismantling price controls. For instance, Zambia increased the official price of maize by 142 per cent between 1980-85. However, the impact of high prices for crops/livestock has been eroded by higher prices for consumer goods and production inputs that farmers buy. Many of these are imported and devaluation has raised their prices. Though
The impact of global crises on women

The price of maize rose in Zambia by 142 per cent, the real price rise for farmers, taking into account the rising prices of what they buy, was only about 6 per cent. So the incentive effect is much less than the change in nominal producer prices would suggest. The impact that such price increases have on women depends crucially on whether the extra cash income is controlled by the men or the women; and if it goes to the men, how do they dispose of it? Do they increase their personal consumption, or make part of it available to their wives for family consumption?

The benefit from higher crop prices also depends on the producers' capacity to increase output. While there is evidence that rural producers do switch from one crop to another in response to changing relative prices, it is far less clear that they will be able to increase output of a wide range of crops in response to a general increase in crop prices. For this depends on their ability to mobilise more of the inputs required — in particular fertiliser, credit, and labour. Women's double burden of crop production and domestic work leaves little spare time. There are many time-budget studies showing the long working day of women farmers. Moreover, other elements of structural adjustment programmes may also make increasing demands on women's time; cutbacks in the public provision of rural health services, education and water supplies, for instance. There is a limit to the extent that women can switch time from human resource production and maintenance to crop production. Thus the provision of public services which reduce the time women must spend in domestic duties is essential in affecting their ability to respond to higher crop prices with higher output.

Even if they do have some 'spare capacity', women may be reluctant to increase their workload because they are unlikely to enjoy the proceeds of extra work. Production of cash crops is frequently under the management of men who then control the resulting proceeds. In such cases, women may refuse to spend extra time weeding and harvesting in their husbands' fields.

The constraints on women's time can also be lifted by making each hour more productive, but that, too, requires public provision, particularly of extension services and credit.

Agricultural labourers will not benefit directly from increased crop prices, though they may benefit if there is an expansion of output which may create more employment. For them, as for urban workers, increased food crop prices will increase their cost of living.
It must also be remembered that many poor farmers are forced to sell their food crops just after harvest to repay debts, and they, too, have to purchase food for the rest of the year.

**Changes in prices of consumer goods**

Increased food prices for consumers are major features of adjustment programmes. Where food imports are high, devaluation, which increases the price of imports, will have a substantial impact on food prices. Removal of food subsidies is also a major feature of adjustment programmes. It is advocated as a major contribution to reducing public expenditure. In Sri Lanka, following the removal of food subsidies, prices rose by 158 per cent for rice, 386 per cent for wheat flour, 331 per cent for bread and 345 per cent for milk powder in the period 1977-84. In Zambia, the price of maize meal, the main consumer staple, was raised in one step by 50 per cent in 1985, as the first stage in removing the subsidy.

If wages are frozen while food prices (and prices of other essential items, such as kerosene) are rising, then real incomes will fall. Urban wage earners in Tanzania faced a 50 per cent fall in real income between 1980 and 1984, while in Ghana over the same period, the fall was 40 per cent.

UNICEF studies reveal a widespread deterioration in the nutritional status of children and pregnant and lactating mothers in both rural and urban areas in countries with IMF stabilisation and World Bank structural adjustment programmes. Mothers are unable to buy enough food of the right type to feed the whole family, and in many cases priority is given to adult males.

**Changes in levels and composition of public expenditure**

Public expenditure on social services has fallen in many developing countries. For instance, in Jamaica, social services expenditure fell by 44 per cent in real terms between 1981-83 and 1985-86. Some schools have been closed and services offered by some hospitals and health centres downgraded. Charges have been introduced for health services, even for the low paid and unemployed. In Nigeria, state governments have imposed fees on both primary and secondary education, and the enrolment rate among poor children has fallen drastically.

Expenditure cuts have often hit recurrent expenditure harder
than capital expenditure, leaving schools short of books, paper and pens and hospitals short of bandages and drugs, even while new hospitals and school buildings have gone ahead. Expenditure cuts have also often hit rural services harder than urban services.

In Sri Lanka, a serious deterioration in the delivery of health care has been noted. Large investments in new and more sophisticated hospitals and equipment have gone ahead while rural services and preventive medicine have remained short of resources. Private practice by doctors employed in the Health Service has been introduced, and studies have found that private patients get preferential access to health service facilities. Privatisation of social services has probably gone furthest in Chile. For example, educational coupons have replaced state-sponsored education, but at a time of recession poorer households have endeavoured to survive by cashing in their coupons, rather than spending them on schooling. Literacy levels have fallen.

One item of public expenditure has been growing, however, and has reached very high levels in many parts of Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. This is the payment of interest and servicing of foreign debt. In Jamaica, this accounted for no less than 42 per cent of total budgeted recurrent expenditure in 1985-86.

Changes in working conditions
It is very likely that for many women, adjustment programmes mean longer hours of work, both paid work and unpaid. Maintaining a household on reduced resources takes more time — hunting for bargains, setting up informal exchange networks with neighbours and kin, making and mending at home rather than buying, etc. Increasing agricultural output takes more time. Making a living in the informal sector in conditions of falling demand takes more time, yet the involvement of urban women in this sector is likely to grow.

However, there is a difference between survival strategies and activities that can form the basis for sustained growth and development both on a personal and a national level. There is a trend towards the casualisation of the work of urban women, not just in the informal sectors of cities in developing countries, but also in developed market economies, where outworking at home is growing. The distinction between the formal sector and the informal sector is being eroded. Women’s jobs in the formal sector are being made more
'flexible' — which frequently means loss of security, loss of fringe benefits such as sick pay, pensions and maternity leave, and increasing intensity of work. Free Trade Zones are one example of this trend. The contracting out of some public sector activities in some countries is another. Increased 'efficiency' in the public sector may be bought at the cost of deteriorating working conditions for women.

The overall impact on women: information priorities

Given the present availability of information, it is not possible to present a definitive picture. In many cases, adjustment seems to have led to a redistribution of real income away from urban areas and towards rural areas. It is estimated that in Tanzania, between 1980 and 1984, there was a 5 per cent increase in real farm incomes, while urban wage earners suffered a 50 per cent fall in real incomes. In Ghana, over the same period, farm incomes stagnated, while urban real incomes fell by 40 per cent. Rural incomes have increased relative to urban incomes in Brazil, Chile and Mexico. However, there are still large numbers of rural people living in abject poverty. None of these general estimates looks at the effects within households.

It should be a priority to monitor the impact of adjustment on the following groups of women:

- women in low-income urban and rural households;
- women employed in the public sector;
- women farmers.

Some work is under way on the impact of adjustment on the poor (notably that by UNICEF on the impact on children). It is necessary to supplement this with specific monitoring of intra-household resource allocation processes. The resources of local research institutes and universities could be called upon to conduct sample surveys of how exactly, within the household, women get access to the inputs they require for their work of raising children and caring for other family members.

Statistics should be compiled from information supplied by the public sector on the employment of women in the public sector; levels of pay; working conditions; turnover, etc. Co-operation with public sector trade unions may be fruitful in helping to monitor the extent to which conditions have deteriorated. This group of women is undoubtedly still likely to be much better off than women in low-
income households, but deterioration in the major source of modern careers for women is still a matter of concern.

The position of women farmers needs monitoring to see to what extent their incentives have improved, and to what extent they are in a position to respond to better incentives. These women are the group who seem to have some chance of benefiting from adjustment, and it is vital to identify any barriers to those benefits being realised.

**Modifying the adjustment process: policy objectives**

Considerable criticisms have already been voiced about the costs of adjustment strategies. It is argued that they bear most heavily on the poor and erode the human resource base of the economy. UNICEF has called for 'Adjustment with a Human Face'; the Overseas Development Institute in London has called for 'Adjustment with Equity'. The World Bank has indicated that structural adjustment must include policies for 'strengthening the human resource base'.

There is scope for Women's Bureaux to participate in this dialogue about modifying the adjustment process. One way would be to join their voices to those of organisations like UNICEF who are arguing for protecting the vulnerable during the adjustment process. There is, however, the disadvantage that this would focus attention mainly on women as victims and runs the danger of deteriorating into paternalism. It also tends to focus only on women in low-income households. It focuses mainly on the detrimental impact of adjustment on women, and not on the contribution that women can make to effective adjustment.

An emphasis on women as producers of goods and services and as reproducers and maintainers of human resources may prove more effective. A dialogue with the World Bank could be opened which emphasises that a prime need for strengthening the human resource base is more time for women, and more control over resources for women. Policy reform and structural changes need to encompass not just relations between public sector and private sector control of resources, but between women's control and men's control of resources.

An overarching objective would be to give the 'Adjustment with Equity' objective a 'gender' content. The objective would then be that poor women should not become worse off than other sections
Structural adjustment

of the population in absolute terms; and that better off women (including farmers and public sector employees) should not become worse off than men in comparable social groups. The indicators of well-being should include not just income, but also total hours of work (paid and unpaid) and health and nutritional status. This might be called an 'Adjustment with Gender Equity' objective.

Modifying the adjustment process: areas of intervention

The achievement of Adjustment with Gender Equity requires greater selectivity in public expenditure cuts, a restructuring of public sector activities, and a greater emphasis on self-reliant food production.

It also requires more finance from donors, to permit a slower pace of adjustment; and provision of appropriate technical assistance and training.

While reductions in public expenditure may be unavoidable, there is scope for much greater selectivity in the cuts. Before reducing food subsidies, other subsidies could be cut (for example, subsidies to national airlines). Food subsidies could be redesigned to increase the benefits to poorer women by removing subsidies on foods consumed mainly by middle and higher income families, and concentrating them on food consumed mainly by poorer families. Or poor families could be cushioned by a food stamp scheme in which they are issued special stamps (or vouchers) which can be exchanged in the shops for food (as has happened in Jamaica and Sri Lanka) though food stamps are not without problems. Direct feeding programmes for children and mothers in poor districts may be the most appropriate measure. Such a programme, supported by food aid, now exists in Jamaica.

Social expenditure on education, health and sanitation, can be given higher priority than prestige urban projects, or the building of new factories that will be unable to operate anywhere near full capacity because of lack of imports. Within social expenditure, there needs to be restructuring to direct services to the poor. UNICEF proposes an emphasis on primary health care, based on rural and urban community clinics, in preference to expensive urban hospitals. It recommends training of more para-medics and traditional midwives in preference to specialised doctors. Such restructuring could also preserve, or even expand, women's
employment opportunities in the public sector, since while specialised doctors are more likely to be men, para-medics may well be women. Restructuring could be linked to incentives for public sector employers to work in rural areas or poor urban districts: jobs in difficult or unattractive environments could be exempted from wage freezes or given special allowances.

If user changes are introduced for social services, these could be differentiated. Fees for university students could be introduced rather than fees for primary schools; or greater increases in charges for electricity, water and sanitation services introduced for those living in wealthier urban areas than for those in low-income areas.

The danger is that public expenditure cuts are determined by administrative ease and the power of organised interest groups. But an expenditure cutting exercise is an opportunity to re-order the priorities of the public sector. A Women’s Bureau can intervene in this by requesting statements of impact of the proposed cuts on women, and by suggesting a different pattern of cuts, if appropriate, and a restructuring of the public sector to meet women’s needs more effectively.

Adjustment is not just about public expenditure cuts and re-organising the public sector. It is also about increasing productivity and promoting growth. World Bank structural adjustment programmes emphasise increasing export crop production, especially through reducing the gap between the price farmers get and the world market price.

Though increasing export crop production may increase foreign exchange earnings when undertaken by one country facing given world market prices, it is questionable whether such a policy is valid when applied uniformly across a large number of developing countries. Since demand for most export crops is growing only very slowly, increased export volume by several countries is likely to depress world market prices and reduce the benefits of increased production. World market prices for primary products, relative to manufactures, are now at their lowest level in real terms since the 1930s.

Expansion of export crop production has not historically benefited women very much, and has often made their position worse. Typically, such crops have been grown under the control of men. Women have been required to work in the fields planting, weeding and harvesting them, but the income accruing from the
sale of such crops has been under the control of their husbands. Women have frequently lost access to better land when it was diverted from subsistence crop production under their control to export crop production under men's control. Export crops have always been allocated better seeds, fertilisers, credit and extension services — and that has meant discrimination against women.

Many governments have been sceptical of World Bank arguments, and have argued that local food production for the local market is a less risky growth strategy. However, many of them are attracted to strategies of large scale irrigated and mechanised food production, highly dependent on agribusiness and imported inputs. The results of many of these schemes have been disappointing and the costs substantially underestimated. One of the reasons for the disappointment has been a lack of recognition of the crucial role of women farmers in food production. What is needed is not simply an emphasis on food production, but an emphasis on self-reliant food production. This means increasing the productivity of small-scale women farmers who do not rely so much on imports, and who grow foods which are staples for poorer groups, such as cassava, as well as food grains such as maize and rice. There are a whole host of critical policy reforms required here to increase the productivity of women farmers. Increasing real crop prices is a necessary condition but it is by no means a sufficient condition. It is essential that more inputs and support services are directed to women farmers, and that strategies are devised for restructuring gender relations to end discrimination against women farmers. This is necessary not only to enable women to reap some gains from the adjustment process, but also to assure an effective adjustment process with some real prospects of sustained growth.


The isolation of the Atlantic Coast region of Nicaragua has economic, ethnic, linguistic, religious and historical dimensions and the people have differing development needs from the rest of the country. At first the Sandinistas did not respond effectively to these needs. Consequently the Contras exploited the area for physical and political support in their US-backed fight to overthrow the Sandinista Government. The Nicaraguan National Assembly then proposed regional autonomy.

The following extracts are from an interview with Dr Myrna Cunningham, Minister for North Atlantic Coast Region to the Nicaraguan General Assembly. This took place late in 1988, during the Sandinista period.

Interview

Does the war mean a change in women's lives?

Women have to play new roles now that men have gone to the war. Women do the productive work in our co-operatives, in the mining areas, in the fields, etc. This has not been very easy for women. In the mining area, for example, women have tried to take on the role that has been traditionally male; they are working as miners. At first they were totally rejected by men who did not agree that women should be allowed in the mines. We had a three-year struggle trying to guarantee mining jobs for women and to break down prejudices. I think we have advanced. Now we are working on a child day-care unit in one of the mines.

In the past those who made the decisions were men, and those who did the work were women. We have been trying to change this. In the Atlantic Coast region, most of the people armed and fighting against the revolution were men. The women worked and, as happens very often, were the victims of what was happening.
During the Contra war, women stayed in the community or were taken to the refugee camps in Honduras. They took care of the children while their husbands or their sons were armed by the Contras.

This is why the first people to begin the struggle for peace in the Atlantic Coast were a group of women from the villages. They said 'O.K., we are all victims, but women and children are suffering the most so we should fight for peace'. The members of the first 'Peace and Autonomy Commission' were all women. And this movement which began three years ago has increased. In February we elected a Committee in which the four different ethnic groups all participate.

A serious problem occurs as a result of repatriation. Men are leaving their weapons behind, leaving the Contras and coming back home. This is good and shows that women's efforts for peace really work; but the men want to become the leaders and the decision makers, to take back their jobs, displacing the women who remained holding the community together for years. So we have tried to train these women to continue to hold power. We have to train them because women are accustomed to say 'O.K. if they are going to do it, let them do it and I'll go back home'. With the women's training programmes we are trying to provide assertiveness courses and support women's self-confidence.

**What kind of participation do women have in defence?**
In the same way that the government calls men to 'reserves', we also have a group of women who are army reservists: they are militia members and in the police. We encourage the participation of women in all sectors. Women have been killed as members of defence units.

Another consequence of the war is death and destruction, and women have also been victims of this. We have over 800 orphans in the region and over 300 mothers whose children have been killed. They don't have any kind of support, so one project is looking into what we can do for women whose close relatives died for the revolution. We have to give these women an opportunity to advance and overcome their pain.

**What happened when a Contra armed group arrived in a village?**
You have people who are killed and others who are kidnapped by
The impact of global crises on women

The Contras. They usually kidnap women, and make them cook and work for them. They rape women in the villages and sometimes take them as their 'partners'. Later they will just throw them away after only a few days. In other areas we have encountered Honduran troops who cross the river and the border, and rape the women. This is the single most serious aggression against women. It is an orchestrated effort to undermine and terrorise a community through violence against women.

And of course, any disruption means that women will have more problems in guaranteeing assistance for their children, the disabled and the elderly.

There were more than 60 per cent of women who were heads of households. How do they survive?
It is very difficult. Women have a lower level of education than men and it is very hard to get a job. We have a high incidence of prostitution. We also have a high incidence of women begging because they can't find work. The family structure has become broken. You can find women who would live with someone; he would then beat her up and treat her badly so she would take another partner.

Is domestic violence more of a problem as a result of the war?
No, domestic violence was there before the war. Maybe we did not mention it before because we had so many other problems and maybe women themselves saw domestic violence as something natural. Well, 'if you love me you beat me'. That's one of the ways in which women experience and justify domestic violence. There is now a national campaign against it.

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WOMEN IN THE ALGERIAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE

MARIE-AIMÉE HÉLIE-LUCAS

'Even in the hardest times of the struggle, women were kept in their place, and confined to the kind of tasks which would not disturb social order in the future. Nurturing and maintenance were the tasks of Algerian women freedom fighters, and occasional medical service. We now know for sure where the liberated women were: in the kitchen, sewing clothes (or flags?), carrying parcels, typing...

The overall task of women during the liberation struggle was symbolic. Confronted by colonisation, the people had to build a national identity, based on the values of their own tradition, religion, language and culture. Women bore the heavy role of being the keepers of this threatened identity and they paid the heaviest price for agreeing — but were there choices? — to play this role.

'One of the early slogans of nationalism in Algeria was promoted by the Ulama, the religious leaders. It said: "Arabic is our language, Islam is our religion, Algeria is our country". Women especially were in charge of raising their sons within the religious faith, reviving traditions, keeping moral standards and teaching the language of the forefathers. (We will not discuss here the legitimacy of Arab language in a country where the dominant ethnics are Berber and speak the Berber language.) Women had to behave according to tradition, while men could have some access to modernity; only traditions which suit the purposes of those who are in power are kept as truly traditional...

'Nevertheless, since there is no humble task in the revolution, we have not argued about the roles we had. It would have seemed so mean to question the priority of the liberation of the country, and raise issues which would not be issues any more after the liberation: we believed that all the remnants of women's oppression would disappear with independence.

'What makes me angry, in retrospect, is not the mere fact of confining women in their place, but the brainwashing which did not allow us, young women, to even think in terms of questioning the
women's place. And what makes me even more angry is to witness the replication of this situation in various places in the world where national liberation struggles are still taking place. We still witness women covering the misbehaviour of their fellow men and hiding, in the name of national solidarity and identity, crimes which will continue after the official liberation.

'This is the real harm which comes with liberation struggles. People mobilise against such a strong, powerful, and destructive enemy that there is no room for practical action in mobilising women at the same time. But worse, liberation struggles erase from our mind the very idea of doing so, which is seen as anti-revolutionary, and anti-nationalist. This vision remains after independence and alienates generations of young women...

'At no point did we see that a power structure was being built on our mental confusion: a power structure which used the control of private life and the control of women as a means to get access to and maintain itself in power. It is in this context that I would like to look again at the activities to which women were confined within the liberation movement. During this crucial period, women had been assigned a place in society which could not be challenged without questioning both the past and the future; the roots for a tightly controlled society were set.

'We are made to feel that protesting in the name of women's interests and rights is not to be done NOW: it is never and has never been the right moment: not during the liberation struggle against colonialism, because all forces had to be mobilised against the principal enemy; not after independence, because all forces had to be mobilised to build up the devastated country; not now that racist, imperialist Western governments are attacking Islam and the Third World, etc. Defending women's rights "now" — this now being ANY historical moment — is always a "betrayal": of the people, of the nation, of the revolution, of Islam, of national identity, of cultural roots...

'It is very hard to persist, in total isolation, in denouncing the stepping back from the women's question of so many once "revolutionary" countries, and to go on organising the struggle. My deepest admiration and regard goes to those of us who stubbornly trace their way through this ideological jungle to promote the cause of women.'
Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas is a sociologist, who taught and carried out research for some years at Algiers University. She is the founder and present coordinator of Women Living Under Muslim Laws Solidarity Network.
Conflict and refugees

War, and the often associated scourges of famine and impoverishment, cause disruption to very many nations, communities and households across the Third World. Conflict and armed struggle cut across the cycles of production and reproduction leading often to displacement and forced migration, as well as death for many. These upheavals lead to temporary, and often permanent, changes in social and economic relations in the society and within the households of that society; war, and resulting hunger, suffering and migration, change gender relations. As men are usually the ones who leave to fight, or when famine strikes move to search for food or work in towns, women are increasingly forced to take on new social and economic roles. They often become effectively the heads of households and take on the responsibilities for providing for the family; yet they rarely acquire the status and rights that accrue to male heads of households. So they are forced to meet new demands, without adequate access to resources such as land, credit, or training. For many women the option of staying at home ceases to be viable and they start the long and painful process of migration across international borders or to safer-but-alien parts of their own countries. The ever-growing numbers of refugees and displaced people worldwide are evidence of the widespread conflict now characterising many parts of the world; the majority of them are women and children who are forced into taking on new responsibilities, shouldering new burdens and surviving under often hostile conditions.

'The impact of global crises on women
dangers characterising their flight to safety, together with insecurity and often interminable waiting periods in camps pending identification of durable solutions on their behalf. Yet, it is evident that refugee women are doubly disadvantaged for, confronted with the trauma of uprooting, deprived of normal family and community ties, property and personal belongings, they have been forced to assume abrupt changes in role and status. Faced with loss, due to death or frequent absences of husbands and young male family members, women headed households are a common phenomenon in many refugee populations today.' (UNHCR Commissioner, quoted in Kelly, 1989, p.85.)

Until recently, the specific problems encountered by refugee women, and the multiplicity of roles they have to play while balancing the competing demands on their time and energy, in situations where they often have no status or support, were largely invisible. Even now, while there is some recognition of the particular needs of refugee women, there is very little basic information and data about them; about their health needs, the productive work they undertake, their experiences of stress, and their subjection to many kinds of violence. But at least there is a growing awareness that women make up the bulk of the refugee (and displaced) populations and that they have definable needs which arise from their roles and responsibilities as refugee women. The UNHCR now has official guidelines stressing the need to take account of women's social and productive roles in order to meet their needs and improve their situation. The objectives of this policy are based on the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies.

An earlier set of guidelines was drawn up in 1988 at an Assembly in Geneva. The preparation for this meeting, the work done during the meeting, and subsequent work, have been crucial in bringing to the attention of agencies and officials both the special problems of women refugees, and also their strengths and resources.

The Geneva Assembly

This assembly, which took place in November 1988 in Geneva, was not the usual meeting of international refugee experts, familiar with each other and with the issues under discussion. Rather, it was a vibrant meeting of women from all over the world, many of them refugees themselves — some settled in the West, many directly from
camps or refuges to which they returned after the Assembly — who came together to focus on refugee women. Many new issues were raised as the refugee voice became dominant; the other, non-refugee women from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Universities, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), spent much time listening to them, as well as contributing from their own experiences drawn from working closely with refugees in different countries.

The universal roles that women play in almost every refugee situation came through clearly during the week. Refugee women are the ones caring for the sick and elderly, for the children and the daily needs of the household. They are often alone in being responsible for the maintenance of the family — and the community — for providing food, water, fuel, health care, education and cultural cohesion. They are often the sole breadwinners, being newly widowed or separated.

At the same time, the dramatic differences between the refugee women from different parts of the world were highlighted, and the need for NGOs and UNHCR to understand the history and culture and specific needs of women and children in very varied refugee situations was stressed. The women in Somali refugee camps have very different problems from those in camps in Southern Africa or the Middle East; there are major differences between refugee women in Central America and South East India. The political, economic and social conditions of their past and their present experience impose different problems and possibilities on women refugees, and these need to be understood by those trying to work with them. It was obvious that information on refugee women is very sparse and the conference played a major role in revealing the glaring need for proper data. Material provided during the meeting began the long process of building up knowledge and understanding about particular groups of refugee women, and about some of the universal issues they face.

Moving personal testimonies were presented in the plenary sessions, workshops and over mealtimes. The enormity of the struggle that refugees are involved in, and the specific burdens and suffering carried by women were graphically communicated. So, too, was their determination and impressive ability to carry on; and the repeated hope for a future time when they will be able to return and rebuild.
Protection

Protection was felt by all to be a central issue, and one that is usually ignored by NGOs and even by UNHCR. Yet the pain of being a female refugee was especially evident during the discussions around protection; the harassment of women often starts from the day they leave their homes and begin dangerous journeys through hostile territory. There is a lack of physical protection against hunger for themselves and their children, and a constant danger of being captured, bombed or shot. The very real danger of rape and sexual harassment mark their journeys from Namibia, South Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, from Sudan, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Central and Latin American countries. The threat of piracy for the boat people and sexual traumas experienced on the high seas are all too real; women can also suffer from the brutality or insensitivity to their suffering of their own men, who are themselves suffering stress and breakdown.

Protection issues affect every aspect of life for a female refugee. For example, without papers (which are often denied to women refugees and only given to men) women are unable to establish businesses or income generating projects legally and so fear harassment by the police; without papers they cannot travel for health, work or education. Fear of physical and sexual harassment within and outside refugee camps can keep women confined to their homes, yet the mental and physical suffering experienced by those women who have been or fear being molested or raped is largely ignored by officials.

Women often need protection also from those organising the distribution of food, blankets and other scarce resources. Women are expected to provide sexual favours in exchange for essential items or safe passage. The refugee women at the assembly said that many organisations feel this to be outside their competence or mandate and so choose to ignore it. The Deputy High Commissioner of UNHCR, however, does take these issues very seriously indeed and in his address to the meeting stressed that these violations must be seen by the world as human rights violations. He urged NGOs and other agencies to return home to advocate that those states who have influence should take up their responsibility and stand behind UNHCR on this issue.

The protection issue was seen to carry over into other areas of health, education, employment and cultural adjustment. Refugee
women usually have very unequal access to goods and services, which puts them in highly vulnerable situations. In addition, their specific needs are often ignored or little understood, even in the spheres of nutrition and health.

Health

Compelling presentations about the official lack of understanding of the food and health needs of women in refugee camps were made by Angela Berry and Roxanne Murphy. Women are still seen primarily as mothers and reproducers, and their health needs relating to their role as producers are often forgotten. Men are usually chosen — for reasons of speed, or because they speak the language of the UN or NGO, or because they are better educated — to provide health training and services. The voices and needs of women are simply not heard, and their special health problems remain unaddressed. These can include, for example, food taboos harmfully restricting their diets; circumcision; sexually transmitted diseases; childhood marriage; or their special energy needs because of their roles as collectors of water and firewood, and as pounders of grain. Their mental health problems, caused by disruption, abuse or rape, are totally ignored in most refugee situations. Yet women are frequently suffering from chronic stress, and are alone as household heads for the first time: many are pregnant or have small children.

   Angela Berry focused on the politics of power in food aid. Food is now increasingly being used as a weapon, and control over food resources is one of the root causes of famine and forced migration in conflict situations. She explored some of the macro-political factors affecting the control of food and food aid between countries, and then went on to look at the politics of food aid at the camp level. In the camps, the distribution of food is a central source of power. Although there are 7 million refugees in camps, and most of them are women and children, men control the food supply. Inevitably, food distribution as a form of power is open to exploitation and consequently the most vulnerable (women and women-headed households) are often mistreated.

   Within households, women are usually last in the pecking order, so in times of food scarcity they get very little. Angela Berry spoke of the suffering of women she has seen in over twenty different refugee situations throughout the world. In Africa, in addition to
issues of the quantity of food aid and its distribution, the lack of minerals and vitamins in the rations provided have had a very serious effect on refugee populations — especially on women because of their reproductive role. Deficiency diseases lead to many unnecessary deaths, and yet there is still no plan to fortify basic rations for refugees in Africa. She reminded the audience that every loaf of bread in Europe is fortified, yet this is not done for the hungry. Scurvy, particularly among pregnant and lactating women, is now endemic among refugees in the Horn of Africa.

Many common issues emerged from the geographical and cultural diversity. These included the absence of women at decision-making levels within the institutions dealing with refugees. The concerns and perspectives of women refugees are not usually discussed at the highest levels, indeed little is known about them and there is almost no research on them. In UNHCR there are two women out of fifteen staff in the technical services, and similar or worse figures would hold true for NGOs and host government agencies. At the grassroots level there is little attempt to involve the refugee women themselves in food distribution, health training, decision making about employment, education and training, and there were strong statements that refugee women want a voice. They want to take more control over their own lives and make their needs understood, so that outsiders can start to address their real problems, assist them better in their main roles, and build on their abilities.

**Employment**

In discussing employment, these themes were reiterated. Many projects designed by agencies for women do not meet women's real needs and only add to their workload. This is true of many income generating projects. Women wanted access to more training and education so that they themselves could increase their potential; at present, many projects keep women at a minimal skills and income level. These discussions were enlivened particularly by the exchange of extremely diverse experiences across continents. For some Central American refugees the key issues were first, access to formal employment, and second, that for those in informal employment the primary focus should not be on competitive marketing but rather on building co-operatives and teaching new forms of community co-operation. For many in Africa the priority
was to eke out a meagre existence under harsh economic conditions. Some excellent examples of good practice came out of Central and Latin America where, in some countries, employment for women refugees is accorded a proper status. Conversely, it emerged that, in other countries, refugee women are ultra-exploited by transnational companies and have no rights at all. They are extremely vulnerable members of the labour force.

In many refugee situations it was said that women may not need income generating projects, but rather adequate protection or childcare facilities, training or better access to food and water so that, where it is possible, they can find time to earn money from activities they know how to do, in their own way. The lack of appropriate employment opportunities for women refugees in so many situations, especially for those who head households, were seen as a major factor pushing many refugee women into prostitution, in and outside the camps.

Education

Education emerged as a priority area for women refugees, as it is for all refugees. Living in a hostile environment with little immediate hope of a return home, education is seen as an essential tool for survival for themselves and their children. In long-term refugee situations, education is seen as the only way to create a better future for the next generation. The women wanted education for their children to be set up immediately during the emergency phase; it was seen as essential as food, shelter and health care. The women voiced a deep need for literacy classes, basic training courses and language training for themselves because they need new skills in refugee situations. The priority placed on education by all groups of refugee women at the Assembly has not, as yet, been taken up by most NGOs or international agencies.

For the future

Underlying all the discussions, speeches, and resolutions was a primary concern that the international agencies must address themselves to root causes. They must find ways to work towards reducing the relentlessly growing number of refugees around the world, caused by wars, civil strife, human rights’ violations and oppression. The level of political and economic analysis and understanding shown by many of the participants around major
issues such as debt, trans-national expansion, the arms trade, militarisation, and superpower rivalry, was sophisticated and deeply felt. They saw little future in only treating the symptoms — refugees — while ignoring the political and economic causes.

The Assembly, which was organised by the Coordinating Group of Women Refugees based in Geneva, produced a detailed set of recommendations on each of the main areas: protection, health, cultural adjustment, education and employment. These, along with guidelines for working with refugee women, have been published and are being distributed as widely as possible to agencies, governments and NGOs working with refugees all over the world. Working with refugee women provides one of the first steps in looking at and understanding the realities and needs of refugee women in different countries throughout the world. Only when these are known can UNHCR, NGOs and others work with refugee women to improve their situation.

The challenge is there, now it is time to meet it; or, as one delegate from South Africa so graphically put it, 'to take the lion by the whiskers'.

References

FOOD PRODUCTION AND THE FOOD CRISIS IN AFRICA

ANN WHITEHEAD

There is a long-term crisis in agricultural production in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Drought and famine years aside, and notwithstanding the effects of political and military disturbances, the farming base is increasingly incapable of supporting, in income or food terms, many of the rural populations on whom national governments and urban populations depend. This effect of the world economic recession within African economies requires a redirection — and successful redirection — of resources to agricultural development in the context of protecting overall economic development. This article examines the role of women in this agricultural crisis, and suggests how aid policies can deal with the interlinkage between the sexual division of labour and the food crisis, especially in the smallholder sector.

Concern over Africa's food crises has focused attention in the last decade on the sexual division of labour in African agriculture. One stereotyped view is that food crises have arisen because the economic changes of the twentieth century have relegated rural women to food production within an under-resourced 'subsistence sector' of small-scale agriculture. This article contests this simplification, arguing for a more complex understanding of the links between the changing structure of gender relations in African farming households and the crises in food production and availability. Women farmers' relation to imperialism is different from that of male farmers, and these differences must be the focus of economic and political analysis. It is also argued here that increasing gender conflict is a response to economic stress and poverty among many strata of peasants and is a symptom of the deep economic crisis in Africa.

The early and mid-1980s in sub-Saharan Africa were marked by full-scale famine in some countries and precarious rainfall in others; also by international awareness of a deepening crisis in food security in the continent as a whole. Debate about the possible
causes of, and remedies for, this food crisis coincided with the rise of a vociferous ‘Women in Development’ lobby which pointed out the very substantial role that women play in food production in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, discussion focused on the link between the food crisis and women’s role in African food production. A dominant view developed that socio-economic change had resulted in rural women being ‘relegated to the subsistence sector’.

This model pictures African agriculture as sharply divided between a low-productivity ‘subsistence’ sector with unimproved techniques and a cash-cropping sector of modern high-productivity techniques. In Women’s Role in Economic Development, Ester Boserup used this model to popularise the idea that sub-Saharan Africa had initially been a female farming area, and that modernisation had captured men but had left women behind. Some of these men migrated to urban employment, yet others became heavily engaged in the production of agricultural exports. Boserup’s work, which has been very influential, was exceedingly important for bringing to the attention of policy makers and academics the productive roles of rural women. It also contributed to the idea that African agriculture exhibited a dualism based on gender: a cash crop sector in which men grow high-income-earning export crops, and a food crop sector in which women use traditional methods to produce food for their families to consume. For some commentators the diversion of resources to export cash crop production was closely bound up with the development of food shortages.

It is still not widely realised that research has shown that this model is far too crude, for a number of reasons, not least of which is the enormous variety in the nature of contemporary African agricultural systems. African men have long grown and continue to grow food crops for self-consumption and women also work on cash crops and are engaged in market production. Cash crops are sometimes food crops, for example maize, groundnuts and rice. Both cash and food crops are grown using a wide variety of techniques; and not all cash crops are grown with modern inputs by any means, for example, groundnuts and cocoa in West Africa. Research on the sexual division of labour has shown that Boserup overstated the extent of female labour in African farming systems and underestimated their involvement in the ‘modern’ sector of the economy.
Nevertheless it is true that men and women do have a different relationship to the agricultural sector as a whole and that African farming families need to grow food both for consumption and for cash income. The main problem is not that cash cropping produces rural starvation, nor that food production is in the hands of under-resourced women, but that there is a competition over which crops should be allocated the scarce resources of land, labour, fertiliser and other inputs. Men and women, because of their different economic roles within the family, experience this competition differently.

**In famine and food crises women suffer most**

Although we do not have the kind of statistical information for rural Africa that we can blaze across the headlines, the information that is available suggests that in food crises and possibly in famines, it is the women who suffer most. This is not because they are physically more vulnerable, because they have babies and rear children (although this must be a factor). Firstly, it is because women are less mobile; when a food crisis hits, men tend to leave to look for work or income to buy food in towns. Women usually have to stay in the rural areas and sit it out. Secondly, food crises hit the poor first and hardest.

The poorest group in rural Africa are women and children living in female-headed households. Large numbers of women-headed households are increasingly the reality in tropical Africa. Indeed, the process of retrenchment into poverty, of women and children, as a result of the world recession, is one of the most important things to emerge as a result of the recent UNICEF studies on poverty. Recovery from food crisis and famine as the good years arrive, does not appear to bring these women and children back up to reasonable levels of income and welfare. The food crisis contributes to the development of this predominantly female pauperised stratum.

**Women’s economic roles in the farm family**

To understand women’s roles in agriculture requires a careful examination of the nature of the African farm household and women’s economic position within it. In addition to that domestic work, and work transforming raw agricultural products into food supplies, for which women are almost universally responsible, most
African women have always done, and still do, independent productive work. Economically they are not expected to rely completely on their husbands or families but to have separate work of their own. Earlier this century, there were places where, in addition to other economic activities, women grew the bulk of the food crops, most of which were consumed by their immediate and extended families. Elsewhere they did a great deal of trading and marketing, while food farming was the men’s responsibility.

These different areas of men’s and women’s work were organised within many kinds of sexual division of labour which were an essential part of rural kinship and households. Although there were numerous aspects to the various family, kinship and household relations of rural African societies, an important dimension was the way in which they organised the exchange of labour between people. This social exchange of labour was not confined to households and could range widely between them, especially where households were small, and/or matrifocal and/or changed frequently in composition. Nevertheless, for many women (and often for younger men too), membership of the rural household meant that they were regarded as lower in status than its senior men or its male head. These men could call upon their social inferiors to work for them, and a wife’s most significant obligations could be to work for her husband and his senior close kinsmen.

The effect was that many women combined farming independently for themselves with work done as unpaid labourers on the farms of others. This provided two very different kinds of social environment for their economic effort. For their independent work women required effective access to resources, including land to farm. Many African feminists have pointed out the importance of these guaranteed rights to resources for rural women in the precolonial economies. Complex conventions surrounded a woman’s rights to dispose of the crops she produced and her obligations to share them with her children, husband and others but in this independent work she did have direct access to the agricultural produce from her land. The work she did for a husband and other senior men was also surrounded by complex claims and obligations. Here the return for her labour was not direct, and if thought of as a return at all, was seen in the context of her general rights to welfare and maintenance as a household member or wife. Occasionally some work took the form of a contract between
husband and wife, the terms of which could be negotiated.

All these arrangements were in the context of a domestic economy in which there was no assumption of an automatic sharing of resources in marriage. Land, cattle, hoes, money, clothes, domestic utensils and much else tended to be owned separately by the husband and the wife. So, too, it was rare for there to be a joint family budget or a single common purse out of which family needs were met. Rather, the separate resources of husbands and wives, which were the basis for their independent economic activities, also involved ways of keeping their incomes separate. These often included divided responsibilities for different aspects of household spending and consumption, for example for the clothes or medical and other needs of children, and a complex division of responsibilities for providing different items of food. (Whitehead, 1981.)

The important contribution made by rural women to African agriculture was realised within this dual work role in a household setting characterised by separate budgets and negotiated responsibilities. These aspects of women's work need to be understood in order to see what has happened to women within the changed economies of contemporary Africa.

Economic transformation and women's work

During the last century, the African smallholder sector has seen a historical process, largely under the impact of colonial policies, in which rural work burdens have been increased. Male labour has seeped away to urban employment or into agricultural employment with the development of commercial agriculture. Women's agricultural work burdens have increased, with relatively little increase in productivity. It is true to say that as a result many rural African women's work burdens are now intolerably high, and this contributes to rural hunger. Some reports link malnutrition in children to women not having enough time left in the day to cook when they get back from the fields. Also because their work burdens are high, some analysts argue that the food crisis arises because there is no possibility of getting women to produce more food without substantially changing the levels of productivity in farming.

I think the picture is even more complicated than this. While it is true that women work too hard, and improved productivity in
African farming is an important factor, many structural and institutional features effect the utilisation of the resources of land, labour and inputs that are already available. The development of more commercial agriculture has created considerable economic pressure which in the case of women is of two main kinds.

Firstly, in their work as independent farmers mainly growing food crops, women are finding it very difficult to get the resources they need; they lose out against men in the competition for land, for labour and for improved agricultural inputs. As more land is taken into production and as it becomes scarce, so women have had difficulty in protecting their land rights on the basis of either local or state codified procedures and laws. The resource base for their independent farming is therefore undermined.

At the same time an increasing proportion of the woman's labour time has been spent in production for her husband, and wives' labour has become relatively more important within the total family labour supply. Most development projects write a woman's labour in as family labour, without checking whether it will be available and what the costs are of her foregoing her work in other areas. When African households' cash requirements were increased by colonial rule either directly (by tax demands) or indirectly (by new consumption goods), the main immediate avenues for earning such income were men's cash cropping or migrant labour. Women members of the household were able to make their contribution to increased cash needs by their work as family labour in cash cropping, or by increased trading. In the initial phases of these processes, insofar as women's welfare was bound up with that of their households, there were simple incentives for them to do this work.

The second pressure arises because, over time, these decisions to undertake more work as 'family labourers' have taken on new economic meanings. As the terms of trade declined for peasants, as land became scarce, and as rural differentiation proceeded, there was increasing evidence of acute stresses and strains. There is no guarantee that the increase in labour time now required for peasant domestic and productive activities affects men and women equally. Among the poorer peasantry, female-headed households emerge as one response to this economic stress. Additionally, as Pepe Roberts explains, the wives' situation as 'unfree labour became increasingly important to the household as commodity relations destroyed other
bonds securing non-free labour (e.g. that of sons) to the peasant household' (Roberts, 1983). This increasing demand for women's labour is reflected in several reports of increased rates of polygamy as well as of conjugal conflict as commodity production increased. The potential for coercion within the customary obligations of a married woman to her husband may become an important element in her increased workload.

In general, women obviously have much greater control over how they spend their income and who benefits from their own independent farm work. It is very much harder for them to determine the spending patterns of the 'household' income from their work as family labour. Different spending preferences between husbands and wives, including different assessments of the importance of children's welfare, reduce the incentive for women to do this family labour. There is widespread evidence that some wives are resisting increased work on their husband's fields because of the welfare effects on themselves and their children. In this case the problem is not the heaviness of the work burdens but whether women perceive any benefit to themselves or their children from working much harder.

Yet all the members of the family need both food production and cash cropping to take place within it. Many items of household consumption must necessarily be bought (e.g. clothes) and withdrawal from the market would imply a deplorable level of unmet basic needs. It is in this light that we should reconsider the struggle over household income. Rural women complain at the selfish way men spend and men complain reciprocally at the constant financial demands from wives. In reality husband and wife have conventionally been allotted different responsibilities for spending, which come into conflict in conditions of economic stress. Women may be particularly responsible for short-term spending — for example, for food — while men are responsible for long-term spending, especially the purchase of farming inputs. Both are essential to survival but where there is not enough income to meet both, impoverishment is experienced as sharp domestic conflict.

Similar considerations apply for the growing number of female-headed households. Abandoned by their husbands and sons, women blame modern men's low standards of personal responsibility, while men argue that women drive them away with unacceptable sexual or domestic conduct and their new desires for
personal freedom. The mutually expressed anger and disappointment obscure poverty as a source of crisis. The main problem here is not the selfishness of rural African men. It is the poverty of many peasant farming households and the way development projects plan for family production.

Extension services, agricultural innovation and planning intervention

Let me now turn from African farmers, men and women, to the form of intervention that national and international development planning involves and the role of African states and international agencies.

Whether or not they are successful in their own terms, many rural development projects funded by a combination of overseas and national agencies appear to make women worse off. Small wonder then that there are often reports of women resisting these changes; in some cases projects have failed because of women's resistance to their role within them.

This cruel paradox — development making women poorer — is what underlies some of the food crisis, so sorting out the reasons for it are important for the wellbeing of all. Examining these projects, we find they have a depressingly similar format. One problem is that many projects ignore the scale and significance of women's independent farming; leave it unmodernised, and recruit women primarily to work as family labour in their husbands' fields. This kind of project leads to poor utilisation of limited resources and exacerbates the conflict between men and women within the family.

African women farmers may be placed in difficult and contradictory situations in which an unenviable choice may have to be made. They may, for example, have to choose between loss of autonomy and poverty. As a 'family labourer', a woman will lose the autonomy of independent farming. However, she may produce more crops and more income: as an unpaid labourer for her husband she may become better off if she helps him become successful. More important, she may also feel that her children's welfare is more secure. However, in addition to a lack of control over spending and welfare decisions, as unpaid workers women do not build up their long-term resources. The decision to do more unpaid family work may hook a woman into a dependence which leaves her very insecure at times of crisis.
But there are other problems. Firstly, historically speaking, the direction and objectives of much agricultural planning and research has definitely not involved a two-pronged strategy of increasing both local food crop production, and cash crop production. Rather, it has neglected food crops, such as millet and yams, in favour of cash crops, such as rice, coffee or cattle farming.

The database is a second problem. Women's role in farming is partly ignored or misunderstood because their work was, and remains, largely invisible in national statistics. This results partly from international conventions about what constitutes work (mainly production for the market, or paid work); from data collection methods; and from stereotypes that both African and European men hold about women's contribution to the economy.

A third problem is much less widely recognised, but emerges very strongly from recent research. It is that there is widespread, systematic and simple sexual discrimination against women in agricultural delivery systems.

I say 'simple' sexual discrimination because not only are there few women in agricultural extension work, and not only are women's crops not targeted for improvement, but innovative, efficient and resourced women farmers are ignored in favour of less endowed and less efficient male farmers (Standt, 1985). A major source of these attitudes is in Western development and agricultural extension training.

Misogyny in development and planning agencies combines with women's disadvantage in access to resources to produce considerable divisions between rural men and women. The reluctance to address this social conflict arises partly because of ideologies which protect family and domestic behaviour from public scrutiny, but it also looks uncannily like a male alliance between 'patriarchal' male farmers and sexist male bureaucrats.

It is a major failing of development projects that they are based on a conceptual model of the African family farm which does not reflect the complex and particular forms of their social relations described above. The planners' model centres on the idea of the conjugally based household as an economic enterprise in which the members work together. The husband/father is regarded as managing the resources on behalf of other members, and those others, conceptualised as his dependents, as providing labour under his direction. Hence the projects require a family labour input from
household members (especially wives) other than the supposed male head. Sub-Saharan African domestic organisation, as shown, is emphatically not of this kind.

The difference between the planners' model and rural reality has important consequences. These are illustrated in a well-known example — that of largely unsuccessful attempts to introduce irrigated rice production in the Gambia (Dey, 1982). The lack of success stemmed in part from just this male-dominant, domestic sharing model of the household which shaped the project. An initial assumption was that the men were rice growers with full control over the necessary resources. Incentive packages including cheap credits, inputs and assured markets were offered to the male farmers. But it was the women who traditionally grew rice for household consumption and exchange, within the kind of complex of rights and obligations between husbands and wives discussed above. The scheme proposed to develop irrigated rice production on common lands to which women had secured use rights. Backed by project officials, men established exclusive rights to these common lands, pushing the women out to inferior scattered plots to continue cultivating traditional rice varieties. All access to inputs, labour and finance was mediated through husbands, and women became notably reluctant to participate in their planned role as family labour. Husbands had to pay their wives for what work the women did do on the irrigated rice fields. Dey and others have argued that the disappointingly low levels of improved rice production arose in part from these misunderstandings.

In other words, forms of stereotyping and discrimination which are rife in Europe and in the international agencies are being reproduced in African national agricultural ministries and extension bureaux.

**Implications for policy**

It is important to highlight the role of agricultural extension services, agricultural innovation and the conventions of development planning because this is an area in which the public voice in the First World has greater relevance.

Agricultural development requires a two-pronged strategy increasing the amount of food produced for self-consumption, at the same time as increasing the amount of marketed crops to provide income.
In order to do this, development intervention must recognise female farmers as part of the human resources in that agricultural strategy; and that they are farmers who face a specific set of constraints and opportunities.

Support must be given to efforts at national level which combat straightforward sexual discrimination in agricultural planning and delivery. This, together with much else of what I have said, implies projects which first listen to, then empower women to farm, within the farm household, in ways in which they can benefit from changed forms of income. This implies channelling resources directly to female-headed households and to wives. If they are written into projects as family labour, this must not been done in such a way that their husbands control all the cash income.

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