

POSTSCRIPT

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Peggy Antrobus

We must recognise the links not only between the fate of Third World women and the politics pursued by the developed countries, but also between the fate of these women and the kind of world the generation of the 21st century of all countries will inherit. We share one planet, and our futures are inextricably linked through the economic and ecological systems which unite us; systems which make it impossible for the majority of the world's people to live with human dignity, force them out of their countries, or into methods and means of survival which ultimately threaten the social, economic and ecological environment of those who perpetuate injustice. There is after all a connection between poverty and injustice, and debt, drugs, militarism, food insufficiency, population pressure and environmental degradation.

Women, although the poorest and most powerless, may hold the key to our 'Common Future'. Poor Third World women are the people who do more than two-thirds of the work in their countries; they are the people who are responsible for meeting the basic needs of most of the people in this world; and they have borne the brunt of the burden of current structural adjustment policies. Their central role in human survival places them at the centre of the balance between sustainable development and ecological disaster. They command our attention not simply out of a sense of justice (the goal of Equality) or expediency (the goal of Development) but because, unless their values, views and visions serve as a central focus for our policy-making, we cannot achieve the ultimate goal of Peace.

Women in development: an alternative analysis

But if the analysis of women's role in development is to help us to achieve this goal of peace — a more just and humane world — we

need an alternative analysis, an analysis which is different from the one which has guided our policies in the past. For after more than a decade of an international programme on behalf of women, the situation of women world-wide remains an indictment of our policies and programmes. Despite the concerted efforts of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within the framework of the UN Decade for Women (1975-85), the majority of the world's women, in the countries of the North as well as in those of the South, were actually worse off in 1985 than they were at the beginning of the Decade. For women in the Third World the situation is even worse in 1989! How did this happen?

Instead of pursuing the logic of a structural analysis which linked women's issues to the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), women accepted an agenda which abandoned both the structural analysis and the attention to women's strategic interests — i.e. those derived from an analysis of the power relationships between women and men, and women and the state. While the focus on meeting practical needs in the areas of employment, education, health and nutrition was important, we failed to recognise that even these practical gains are easily reversed if women lack the power to protect them when resources are scarce. This is exactly what has happened in the context of the structural adjustment policies pursued by most of our governments in their efforts to deal with the problems of debt, chronic balance of payment imbalance, and budget deficits.

But what is this flawed Women in Development (WID) analysis? The Decade's goal of 'integrating women in development' was based on the assumption that women were 'outside' the process of development and needed to be 'integrated' into the mainstream; and that, if policy makers and planners could be made aware of the important role of women in development, more resources would be made available to them. Women would receive more of the benefits of development — e.g. access to the resources and services required to build their capacity to contribute more fully and effectively to development efforts. A number of strategies aimed to document and quantify women's work, making it visible to planners. This was the 'expediency' approach!

However, the research generated by the Decade showed that women were not 'outside' development. Indeed, to many activists and practitioners alike, it was becoming increasingly clear that

women's contribution was central to 'development', the very base on which development was constructed, but in a way that was deeply exploitative of their time, labour, both paid (in the workplace) and unpaid (in the household), and their sexuality. This has been clearly illuminated by the policies of structural adjustment. I would argue that, far from failing to take women into account, these policies are actually grounded in a set of assumptions which assign certain roles and characteristics to women. Indeed, it is clear to me that both components of the structural adjustment policies — those aimed at reducing consumption (the austerity measures reflected in the cuts in government expenditures in social services) as well as those aimed at increasing export-oriented production (the emphasis on the promotion of Free Trade Zones) — are dependent on assumptions about the roles into which most women have been socialised. These roles are mediated by class, race, ethnicity and the level of development of the society. For this reason some people now prefer to speak of 'gender' roles rather than 'women's' roles, to give specificity to the analysis and reveal the differences between women of different social groups.

Moreover, it is because of the central importance of these roles in reproduction, in meeting the basic needs of the poorest sectors of the society, that policies which place them in jeopardy have negative consequences for the whole society, and ultimately for production itself. Production is not only dependent on the availability of capital, technology and markets but also on the physical, psychological and intellectual capacity of the labour force. All of these qualities are determined in the social sector, the sector in which women are key actors, not passive recipients of welfare services. Unfortunately, this critical link between women's productive and reproductive roles is one which is typically overlooked in conventional, growth-oriented models of development.

A gender analysis of these policies calls into question the fundamental assumption of the WID approach. The recognition of women's work has been used to justify cutting resources to them. What is the alternative approach — what I would term the wisdom approach — the alternative analysis of the issues of women, and of development?

Elements of an alternative analysis

The following elements are suggested:

The analysis should recognise the differences between approaches or paradigms which aim at maintaining the *status quo* and those 'alternative' paradigms which seek to promote social change, while recognising the limitations of an 'alternative' paradigm which remains focused on an economic, materialist, and positivist approach to the social sciences. I would argue that lack of explicitness about theoretical frameworks and paradigms has been a major contributor to the blurring of our analysis of development.

The analysis should be one which attempts to relate experience at the micro level of the sector, community, project, or household, to the macro-economic level. A gender analysis of structural adjustment policies illustrates the ways in which macro-economic policies affect women's experiences at the level of the poorest household. Unless this experience is used to inform macro-economic policies, and vice versa (i.e. unless people at the micro level can analyse and understand their situation within a structural analysis) no meaningful change can be effected.

We need an analysis which is holistic i.e. one which seeks to integrate social, cultural and political dimensions into economic analysis. This has been borne out by the futility of focusing on economic production at the expense of the social sector (reproduction).

We need an analysis which recognises the political nature of the processes of development, and that the concepts and causes of 'development' and 'underdevelopment' reflect imbalances of power within and between nations rather than the presence or absence of resources.

Finally, we need an analysis which is feminist in orientation. We need to reject the separation of private and public domains; of the household from the economy; of personal and political realities; of the realms of feeling and intuition from that of rationality; above all we need to reject an analysis which lies within the monetised sector of the economy.

This analysis emerged from Third World women at the end of the UN Decade for Women. This expanding network of women are proposing Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), and we have established a programme of on-going research, training, communications, publications and advocacy extending from the grassroots to policy making at the international level.

We recognise that: 'Feminism cannot be monolithic in its issues, goals, and strategies, since it constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds.' And, therefore, would have to be: 'responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves'. (Sen and Grown, 1987.)

However, we see this diversity, built on a common opposition to gender oppression and hierarchy, as a first step in articulating and acting upon a political agenda which would include challenging all those structures, systems and relationships which perpetuate and reinforce the subordination of women, everywhere.

Most of all, we see feminism as a transformational politics, with the capacity to transform not only individual lives but all the structures of oppression and domination which shape women's lives, including racism, class and nationality. The concept of feminism itself has been transformed. We argue that there is no issue — from the international debt to military budgets, from the famines in Africa to the industrial disaster at Bhopal — which could not be illuminated by a feminist perspective. Our concern is not just for women, but for our world. Our vision is of:

'A world where inequality based on class, gender and race, is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. Where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Where women's reproductive role will be defined ... and where the massive resources now used in the production of means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression, both inside and outside the home.' (Sen and Grown, 1987.)

Our work is just beginning. We link the past history of development policies to the strategies of the current systemic crises — in the

production and distribution of food, water and fuel availability, international debt, militarism — and a growing conservatism opposing women's changing roles. As we approach the 21st century, we hope that the perspectives of poor Third World women will be taken seriously in decision-making processes, from our households, communities, and workplaces to national, regional, and international levels of policy making.

Finally, allow me to observe that, apart from the analysis, what we, the members of the DAWN network, have to say is not so different from many of the statements of those Europeans who have given leadership in the efforts to raise a sustainable and human world by alerting an unconcerned northern elite to the 'Limits to Growth'; to those who call attention to 'Our Common Future' (Brundtland); and to the interdependence of North and South (Brandt).

In 1982, at a time when the North-South dialogue had all but ceased, that visionary Italian of the Club of Rome, Aurelio Peccei, wrote in his foreword to the book *Making it Happen*:

'At the root of the problem seems to be an incapacity or unwillingness to change our world outlook, our mentality and attitudes. At the very moment when fundamental change and innovation have become indispensable, we seem frozen in our ways of being and modes of doing.'

The founder of the DAWN network, the Indian economist Devaki Jain, had an answer for this when she addressed the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris in 1983:

'The more I dissect and analyse and derive and pursue, the more I see hurdles ahead of any attempt to regenerate a just and peaceful society. The tunnel does not find an end through reason alone. But I believe — it is my real belief — that with faith in the ability of humans to change their destiny through their own will and collective determination, I see the potential of a united women's movement being a force in the world which can heal the divisions and thaw the confrontation and perhaps even the order — the economic and social order.' (Jain, 1983.)

This article is adapted from a paper presented at XVth Annual General Assembly of Development Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Brussels, April 18-21, 1989.

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INDEX

- abortion 83, 84, 100; *see also* foeticide, female
 access 151; for refugees 64, 65-6; to banks 242; to birth control 93, 96; to childcare 97; to health care x, 79, 90, 107; to local institutions 174; to public sector services 42-3; to the public sphere 300; to education 10-11, 79
 ACORD 203, 205, 207
 Action for Gender Relations Asia (AGRA) 144-5
 Adam, Firoza 130
 administrative problems 227-8
 Affole Project, Mauritania 202-3
 Afghanistan 303
 Africa 16, 62, 64-5, 91, 166, 186, 289-94;
 food production and food crisis in 68-78; West 69, 99; women and AIDS in 93-5
 African National Congress (ANC) 118, 124, 127, 129; Women's League 118, 120, 122, 125, 129
 agriculture, changing nature of
 production 19-20; innovation in 75-7;
 women's role in 70-2, 132-3
 Ahmed, Kaddija 213
 aid agencies, appropriate tools 137;
 staffing 138
 AIDS, beliefs about 99; children and 95-6, 100; and discrimination against women 80-1, 91-102; and prostitution 107-8
 AIDs-testing, and counselling 94, 96;
 demand for 92; in pregnancy 95-6
 Akal 197-9
 alcoholism 112
 Algeria 18, 57-9
 Alim 196-7
 amniocentesis 83
 Amuah, Donald 236-44
 animal husbandry 191, 202-9, 248
 Annapurna Mandal 221
 anti-poverty approach 164-6
 Antrobus, Peggy 14, 21, 140, 280, 281, 283, 311-17
 apartheid 82, 118-31; women's resistance to 120-5
 Ara Khan, Hosne 17, 80, 89-90
 Arapesh, the 4
 Arregui, Marivi 30-8
 Asia 16
 Asian Rare Earth (ARE) 24-5
 attitudes 145, 295-8, 309, 316; of
 bureaucracy 234
 Baez, Clara 30-8
 Ball, Claire 188, 263-7
 Bamachellan, cereal bank 293
 Bangladesh 80, 86, 89-90
 bank credit 220, 232
 Bank for Housing and Construction (BHC) 241
 banks, mobile 242; role in income generating schemes 241-2, 243
 Bantu Women's League 120
 bantustans 125-6
 Barka 212
 begging 56, 104
 Bengal 219, 223
 Berry, Angela 64
 Bertell, Rosalie 25
 birth attendants, traditional (TBAs) 217-18
 Black Consciousness movement 122
 Black Sash 125
 black women 118-31
 Block Development Office, India 225
 Bloemfontein 120
 blood banks 107-8
 boat people, piracy threat 63
 Bolpur 219
 Bombay 169
 Boserup, Ester 69, 163
 brainwashing 57
 Brazil 31, 49, 81, 91, 103-8, 188, 261-2
 Brett, April 1-7, 280
 bride burning 169
 bride price (*lobola*) 119, 128, 287
 British, in Eritrea 215-16
 Bronstein, Audrey 256-60
 Bukit Merah 24-6, 28
 bureaucratic constraints 299-302
 Burgess, Doris 82, 187, 210-18
 Buthelezi, Chief 127
 Buvinic, M. 161, 165
 Campeche 267
 Cape Town 119, 128
 Caribbean 16, 48, 91
 Carloni, A.S. 190-1
 cash, controlled by men 199-200
 cash crop production 19-20, 22, 46-7, 69, 76, 245
 cash economy 195
 cassava 53
 Central America 62, 65, 308
 Central American refugees, in USA 267
 cereal banks 293
 challenge to status quo 6, 57-9, 262, 282-3, 287, 314
 change, resistance to 213, 316; *see also* social change
 Chiapas 267
 child labour 123, 126
 childbearing, choice over 160; early 85-6

- childcare, campaigns 124; provision 37, 166; role of men in 4
 children, and AIDS 95-6, 100; and female employment 37; street 103; unwanted 270
 Chile 48, 49, 256-60
 Christian Women's Movement, S.A. 127
 church 188; and prostitution 107
 CIPAF (*Centro de Investigacion para la Accion Femenina*) 34, 255
 circumcision, female 64, 81, 109-10
 class 147-8, 223, 280-1, 295-7
 clothing industry, role of women in 30-1, 33
 co-operatives 65
 cocaine 105
 cocoa industry 45
 COCOBOD 237, 238, 241, 243
 colonialism 246
Comite del Distrito Federal (CDF) 263-4
 communication problems 264
 community, ways of approaching the 139
 community development, and traditional systems 293-4
 community management 4, 112, 139, 158
 community organisations, and participation in public life 116
 condom usage 92, 93, 96, 99, 108
 conflict, and refugees 18-19, 60-1
 CONSA 33
 conscientisation 151-2, 155
 consciousness-raising 112, 169, 179, 188, 192, 288, 289
 conservation, women's role in 15, 26-8
 construction industry 268-72
 consultants, contracting of 181
 consulting women, improving ways of 175-6
 contraception 93, 309
 Contrás 54
 control 152; of food supplies 194, 199-200; over economic resources 50, 230; over factors of production 180; over own bodies 162, 168
 COSATU (trade union congress, SA) 123-4, 129
 Costa Rica 111-17
 counselling 188
 credit management 240, 242, 244
 credit schemes 228-9, 292; revolving 97
 crops, high yielding variety 176-7; *see also* cash crop production; export crop production
 cultural constraints 148, 207, 282, 299-302
 culture, gender and development 144, 286-8
 Cunningham, Myrna 18, 54-6
 dangerous work 22-6, 237
 Dankelman, Irene 14
 daughters, attitudes to 80, 84, 87, 103, 133
 Davidson, Basil 215
 Davidson, Joan 14
 DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) x, 140, 168-9, 170, 280, 281, 315-16
 debt x, 9, 13, 21, 48
 decision-making 6, 9, 206-7, 285
 defence, female participation in 55
 deficiency diseases 65
 deforestation 15, 26-8
 Delhi 83-4, 86-7
 democracy, transition to 118-31
 dependence of Third World nations 9, 162
 developed countries, casualisation of urban women 48
 development, alternative analysis of women in 311-17; barriers to women's 79-82; gender and culture 286-8; gender in and feminism 295-8; involvement of women in 277; obstacles to 8-9; overintegration of women 280, 284-5; power relationship with 168; and social change 305
 development criteria, women's 151-3, 156-7
 development programmes, analysis of 141-8; and women's issues 155-7
 Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), India 229
 Dey, J. 77
 Differentiated Rate of Interest Scheme (DRI), India 220, 225
 direct feeding programmes 51
 direct matrix ranking 176
 disarmament 169
 discrimination, against women 83-8, 160, 223; against women, AIDS and 91-102; positive 164; sexual in agricultural delivery systems 76, 78; in women's health issues 80, 89-90
 displaced people 19, 60-7
 division of labour, international 15-16, 31; sexual 3-4, 16, 68, 71, 132, 160, 179, 202
 divorce 133, 135, 287
 domestic economy, African 70-2
 domestic service 104, 106
 domestic violence 56, 115, 167
 domestic work 285; and participation in public life 112-13
 Dominican Republic 253-5
 Dominican Republic, women in FTZs 16, 32-7; social perspectives 36-7; sociodemographic characteristics 33-4; working conditions 35-6
 dowry death (*sati*) 83, 226
 dowry payments 80, 81, 84, 103, 223, 238, 287
 drama 188, 255
 drawings, depiction of trauma in 266
 drugs 21, 104, 105; basic traditional 217
 Eade, Deborah 282, 306-10
 earnings, women's 32, 35, 284-5
 ecology 15, 22-8, 311
 economic analysis, gender bias in 39-40
 economic independence, and equity 163-4
 economic participation, women's 166
 economic policy formation, 285

- economic transformation, and women's work 72-5
 economy 311; deterioration in Third World 17; and human resources 40-1
 education 8, 10-11, 13, 169, 231;
 compulsory 134; female 223; popular 188, 253-5; and refugees 66; women's and pay 32; of young women 291
 educational proletarianisation 34
 efficiency approach 166-7
 Egnor, Margaret 87
 electronics industry 16, 25, 33
 Elson, Diane 17-18, 39-53
 emergency relief programmes 161-3
 employment 8; laws for women's rights 9-10; of refugees 65-6; women's paid and participation in public life 114
 Empower, Thailand 99
 empowerment 6, 150, 167-70, 281, 304
 'Engendering Adjustment' 18
 entry strategy 172-4
 environmental degradation x, 14-15, 21, 22-8
 equality 8, 11, 149, 296; forms and levels of 150-3; gender 145; legislation 1, 42
 equity approach 163-4
 Erigavo, Somalia 203
 Eritrea 18, 187, 203, 210-18
 Eritrean People's Liberation Front 213, 214
 Eritrean Women's Association 214
 ethical problems 282, 304
 ethnic differences 147-8
 European Commission 194
 evaluation 137-40, 155, 160, 181-3
 expediency 311, 312
 exploitation 230, 313
 export crop production 52, 313
 extension services 75-7
 family labourers, women as 73-4, 75
 family planning 93, 96, 231, 309
 family relationships, and female employment 37
 family responsibilities, and participation in public life 112-13
 family unit 239, 297; fragmentation of 167, 195
 famine 13, 19, 20, 70, 210
 fear, overcoming 256-60, 276
Federation des ONG au Senegal (FONGS) 292
 Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) 120-2, 123, 125
 Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) 123
 female infanticide 87
 female-headed households 60, 70, 74-5, 82, 114, 125-6, 135, 167, 187, 206, 238
 'Feminine Pain' 109-10
 feminism 253, 295-8, 314; feminism, popular 256; and prostitutes 108; questioning 281; Third World 168-70; as transformational politics 315; urban 291, 297; Western 144, 164, 167, 173, 281; indigenous 281
 feminist man 289-94
 fertiliser industries 23-
 fertility control, *see* family planning
 feudalism 215
 field animation support 244
 field visits 182-3
 foeticide, female 80, 83-4
 food aid 51, 64
 food crises, women in 2, 21, 68-78
 food crops, neglect of 76; prices 45
 food paths 177
 food production, local 53; self-reliant 53
 food security 244
 food stamp schemes 51
 food stores, buffer 238, 244
 food subsidies 51; removal of 47
 food taboos 64
 food-for-work schemes 193, 194, 195, 197-9
 Ford Foundation 140, 308
 'Forward-Looking Strategies' 2, 8-11, 61
 Francisca 188, 261-2
 Free Trade Zones (FTZs) 16, 45, 49, 253, 313; and women workers 30-8, 114
 funding activities, ineffective 307-8
 Gabriela 99, 169
 Gambia 5, 77
 Ganga Action Plan 268
 Gao, Mali 205
 Garcia-Moreno, Claudia 80, 91-102
 Gascoigne, Liz 280, 282, 299-305
 gender, checklists on 140, 177; culture-specific 3-4, 286-8; definition of 2-3; as a development issue x, 1-7, 286-8
 gender awareness 137-40, 145, 149-57; need for 149-50; in project planning 137-40, 172-8; training in 188
 gender bias, in economic analysis 39-40; in health policies 91-102
 gender conflict, and African food crises 68
 gender debates 279-83
 Gender and Development Unit (GADU) vii-viii, ix, 144, 203
 gender inequalities 6, 280, 285, 286-8, 295-6
 gender needs, *see* interests
 gender relations ix, 174-5
 Geneva Assembly (1988) 61-2
 Ghana 45, 47, 49, 187-8, 236-44, 284
 global crises, impact on women 13-21
 gonorrhoea 92
 Graill, Johannesburg 126-7
 group interviews 177
 group leaders 146-8
 group management, enabling skills for 175
 groups, self-questioning 307
 Guatemalan refugees 263-7
 Gusii, the 245
hagbad 133
 Haitians 254
 handicraft schemes 220-35, 248
harambee and development, women's group 250-1

- Harrington, Barbara 263-7
 health, of refugees 64-5, 264-5; women's needs x, 8, 10, 79-80, 89-90, 210-18; and women's socio-economic status 89-90
 health care 13, 51, 187, 210, 215-18
 health policies, gender bias in 91-102
 Heegan village, Yaqshiid district, Somalia 135
Hélie-Lucas, Marie-Aimée 18, 57-9
 heroin 98
 HIV disease, *see* AIDS
 Honduras 55
 Horn of Africa 65
 'hospitality girls' 92, 99
 households, changes due to structural adjustment 43-4; distribution of resources within 44, 49, 64-5; proletarianisation of peasant 114; as unit of analysis 5, 174-5, 286, 287
 housing 169
 human resources, economy and 40-1
 human rights violations 63
 hunger 19-20
Ibrahim, Rhoda 82, 132-6
 ideology, and the gender issue 144
 Ilambazar Thanas 219
 illiteracy 11, 24, 125, 285, 300; *see also* literacy campaigns
 impoverishment, *see* poverty
 income generating projects 97, 147, 164-5, 187, 237-8, 248; critique of 219-35; and participation in public life 116
 incomes, changes due to structural adjustment 44-7; disposal of women's 238-9; rural and urban 49
 India 80, 83-8, 138, 169, 187, 189, 219-35, 268-72, 287; Prevention of Immorality Act 98; South 87, 191; South East 62; West 141-8
 Indians, in Malaysian plantations 22
 Indonesia 191
 inequality, *see* gender inequalities
 information, priorities for women in structural adjustment 49-50; quality for planning 176-7
 inheritance, legislation 169; matrilineal of livestock 208; and women's ownership 133
 Inkatha movement 127
 institutions, male dominated 168
 Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), India 220, 225
 interests, practical and strategic 139, 158-71
 International Monetary Fund (IMF), stabilisation packages 17, 41, 111, 166
 International Women's Year (1975) 2
 intervention 281; methods of 291; modifying in structural adjustment 51-3
 Iran 191
 Isiolo, Kenya 204-5
 Islamic law 133, 299-305
 Italians in Eritrea 215
 Jag Sakhi (women's awakening) 270
 Jain, Devaki 316
 Jajmao 268
 Jamaica 45, 47, 48, 51
 Japan 26
 Jayawardena, K. 167
 Johannesburg 127, 128
 Kampala 99
 Kanpur 268
 Kariwareng food-for-work camp 197-9
 Kenya 5, 92, 187, 189, 203, 204-5, 245-52; north west 193-201; northern 186
 Kerala 86
 Khuzistan 191
 Kiambu 249
 Kikuyu, the 245
 Kliptown, Johannesburg 121
 La Romana, Dominican Republic 253-5
 labour, pastoral women's 195-7; social exchange of 71; women as cheap 15, 16; women's and health 89-90; women's share in Africa 284; *see also* division of labour; unpaid work
 labour codes 168
 labour market, discrimination in 31-2, 223
 labour rotation, in FTZs 35-6
 land issues 73, 103, 114, 213-14, 261
 landless women 224, 288
Las Esclavas del Fogon 253-5
 Latin America 48, 66, 91, 166, 188
 laws, change in 6
 leadership roles, women's 179
 Leite, Gabriella 91-2, 103-8
 life expectancy, women's 11, 89
Ling, Chee Yoke 14, 22-9
 literacy campaigns 214, 215
 livestock programmes, women in 202-9
 loans 220, 228-9, 242-3; repayment of 228-9, 233, 243
 Lokitaung settlement, Kenya 193
 London 93, 96
Longwe, Sara Hlupekile 6, 138, 149-57
 Luo, the 245
Magrath, John 103-8
machismo, and participation in public life 114-15
 'macho' attitudes 81-2
 macro-economic level 314
Maendeleo Ya Wanawake 246
 Maharashtra 83
 Malaysia 22-9
 male biased vocabulary 149
 male unemployment, in FTZs 36
 male urban employment 72
 Mali 203, 207; *Programme d'apui aux actions associatives et cooperatives* 205; *Unite Laitiere Cooperative de Tin Hama* 203
 Malinowski, B. 5
 malnutrition 72, 89, 107
 Mandela, Nelson 124, 128
March, Candida 273-8, 279-83
 marginalisation of women 22, 111, 143, 292, 302

- market, and adjustment 41; women and the state 42-3
- marriage, arranged 223; early 64, 80, 83, 85-6; settlements 288; and training 303
- married women, 34; and AIDS 99; and salaries 31-2
- Masailand 273
- masons, women as 189, 268-72
- Mathew, Brian** 15, 81, 190-2
- Mauritania 202-3
- Mayoux, Linda C.** 187, 219-35, 282
- Meer, Shamim 119-20, 123, 124
- Mehta, Mona** 138, 141-8, 280, 286-8
- men, integration into women's projects 291-2; involvement of 239
- Menelik, Emperor of Ethiopia 215
- Mengistu, Haile Mariam 216
- mental health 167; of refugees 64, 266, 267
- Mexico 49, 189, 263-7, 306, 308, 309
- Mhlope, Gcina 130
- Middle East 16, 62
- migration 18, 60-7; female 134, 135; rural-urban 19
- military roles, women's 18
- mining, women in 54
- Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh 268
- Mitsubishi Corporation 26
- Mkhwanazi, Mary 127
- modernisation theory 162, 163
- Mogadishu 203
- Molyneux, Maxine 139, 159, 160, 173
- MOMUPO 188, 256-60; campaigns 258
- mortality rates, infant 85, 86-7, 218, 300; maternal 86, 218
- Moser, Caroline O.N.** 5, 6, 138, 139, 158-71
- Mosse, Julia Cleves** 80, 83-8
- Munro, Miranda** 138, 139, 140, 172-8
- Murdock, George 3
- Murphy, Roxanne 64
- Muse, Dahabo Ali** 109-10
- Muslim culture 90, 214, 223, 230, 293
- Mwau, Adelina Ndeto** 188, 280, 284-5
- Nakajima, Dr 98
- Namibia 124
- Natal 127
- Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) 123, 127
- Nataraj, Shyamala 98
- national liberation movements 57-9, 134, 168
- National Union of Eritrean Women 212, 214
- needs assessment, women's 153-4, 175, 179
- neocolonialism 163
- Nerayo, Teklemichael 216, 218
- networking 188, 189
- New International Economic Order (NIEO) 312
- New York 91
- NGOs (non-governmental organisations) 8, 62, 172, 202, 280, 282, 290
- Nicaragua 18, 54-6, 306, 308
- Nigeria 47, 202
- nomads 132-3
- nutritional status of children and pregnant and lactating mothers 47
- Oakley, Anne 2, 3-4, 5, 172-3
- ODA 140
- oppression 275; mental 289
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 166
- Orota 216-17
- orphans, and AIDS 100
- outworking at home 48
- Overseas Development Institute, London 50
- Oxyby, Clare** 20, 187, 202-9
- Oxfam, 236-44, 286; Country Programme Review 181-3; Country Programmes 156-7; views of workers 279-83; West India 141-8; Woman Project Officers 141-8; *see also* Gender and Development Unit (GADU)
- Pala, A.O. 245, 246
- Pan-Africanist Congress 122
- para-medics, training of 51-2
- parastatals 43
- participation 149, 152, 172, 212, 302; women's in public life 111-17; women's in unions 129
- partners, and women 146-8
- pastoral women 186, 187, 189, 193-201; in livestock programmes 202-9; status of 200; workshop 273-8
- paternalism 146-7, 231
- Patpong 99
- patriarchy 42, 76, 89, 146, 155, 169, 256, 264, 299-305
- peace 8, 311
- Peccei, Aurelio 316
- Penan community, Malaysia 26-7
- Penny, Anne** 8-11
- pensions for prostitutes 104
- People Against Woman Abuse (POWA) 128-9
- pesticides, toxic 23-4
- Philippines 92, 99, 169
- Pietermaritzburg 128
- pimping 105
- Pinochet regime 256
- Piza Lopez, Eugenia** 54-6, 82, 111-17, 253-5, 261-2, 282
- planning 75-7, 137-40, 179; bad 227-8; gender 158-71; gender awareness in project 137-40, 172-8; improving quality of information for 176-7
- plantations 15, 16, 23-4
- poisoning, of women workers on plantations 23-4
- police, and prostitution 106-7
- policy, and agricultural extension services, innovation and planning 77-8; AIDS and women's needs 96-7; and gender planning 160-1; modifying

- objectives in structural adjustment 50-1
- political mobilisation 169, 212-14, 224, 249, 251
- political parties, and patronage 229; women in, 117; and women's groups 249
- political rights of women, UN Convention on 1
- pollution 15
- polygamy 74, 119, 132, 133, 237, 240
- poor women, targeting 233-4
- population issues 2, 21
- poverty 19-20, 21, 89-90, 152-3, 224-5, 281-2; AIDS and 101
- power, relationship with development 168
- power systems 58, 64, 289, 312
- preference ranking 176-7
- Pretoria 121
- prices, world for primary products 52
- prices of consumer goods, changes due to structural adjustment 47
- private sector, formal and informal 43, 48-9
- production 4, 79, 112, 139, 158, 299-300, 313
- productive base, decline in 19-20
- projects for women 154-5, 231-3, 290
- property, woman as 286, 287
- property relations in marriage 83
- property rights 168
- prostitutes, child 104; old 104
 - prostitution 56, 103-8; and AIDS 80-1, 91-3; among refugees 66; earnings from 106; health risks 107; male 91; organisation of 105; UN Convention on 1
- proverbs, sharing of 273-5
- public expenditure, changes due to structural adjustment 47-8, 51
- public sector, women employed in 49
- public sphere 111-17, 300, 303, 305
- Pugansoa, Ben** 15, 187-8, 236-44
- Punjab 84-5
- racism 118-31, 254
- radioactivity 24-6
- rape 56, 63, 128, 169; in marriage 128
- Rape Crisis centres, South Africa 119, 128
- Rapid Rural Appraisal techniques 176
- Reagan, Ronald 41
- recession 9, 166
 - refugees 19, 55, 60-7, 128, 188-9, 206, 263-7; education 66; employment 65-6; health of 64-5, 264-5; mental health 63, 189, 264-7; and prostitution 66, 93; protection for 63-4; roles of women 62
- repatriation 55
- repression 256-60, 263-7, 264
- reproduction 4, 112, 139, 158, 299-300, 313
- research 188
- resource allocation 41
- rice 53, 77
- Rio de Janeiro 103-8
- risks, of being female 83-8
- Roberts, Pepe 73
- 'Rosie' 95, 98
- Rubin, Frances** 140, 181-3
- rural development projects 75-7
- rural women 125-6, 132-6
- Rwanda 96
- Sablaale Settlement Scheme, Somalia 206, 207
- Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia) 24
- Sahel 212
- Samburu 204-5, 273, 277-8
- Sandanistas 54
- Sao Paolo 105
- Sarawak 26-8
- Sarr, Abdou** 281, 289-94
- savings 292
- savings groups 207
- scurvy 65
- seasonality 232
- seclusion, women's 223, 300, 305
- Selassie, Haile 216
- self-discovery 261-2
- Self-Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad (SEWA) 221
- self-image, women's 115-16, 231
- self-reliance, women's 214-15
- Senegal 5, 292, 294
- Senhit 212
- sex, distinguished from gender 2-3
- sex education 96
- sexism 114-15, 118-31; institutionalised 83
- sexual harassment 63, 128, 129
- sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) 64, 91-102, 107-8
- sheanut loan scheme, Ghana 236-44
- situational analysis 177
- skills-upgrading 232, 268-72
- social change 6, 82, 207, 282, 299-305, 314; need for 289-90; and rural women 132-6
- social mobility, women's 299-300
- social services 43; differentiated user-changes 52; drops in expenditure 47-8; privatisation of 48
- Somalia 62, 81, 82, 109-10, 132-6, 203, 206, 207, 273, 303
- South Africa vii, viii, 82, 118-31
- South African Communist Party 122
- Soweto uprising (1976) 122
- Sri Lanka 45, 47, 48, 51
- statistics, aggregated 17
- status of women 179-80, 200, 231
- stereotypes, breaking of 268-72
- street children 103
- structural adjustment x, 13, 17-18, 311; effect on women 39-53
- sub-Saharan Africa 19, 45, 48, 68-78
- subordination and economic policy formation 285; of women x, 119
- Sudan 203, 303
- Sulabh International 268, 270-2
- syphilis 92
- Taiwan 31
- Tambo, Oliver 118

- Tamil Nadu 87
 Tanzania 47, 49, 100
 technologies, hazardous 22-9; male-dominated 81, 190-2
 terracing 288
 Thailand 98, 99
 theatre of the oppressed 255
 Tigre 18
 Timbuktu 205
 time, women's 50, 293
 time-budget studies 46
 Tonga 191
 tourism, and AIDS 98
 trade, licences to 237, 241
 tradition, as sacred 297-8
 training, in FTZs 35; of women as masons 268-72
 Transkei 127
 transnational companies 15-16, 30, 66; and the environment 14-15
 transport problems 239, 242, 243
 Transvaal 127
 Trobriand Island 4
 Turkana 186, 193-201, 204-5, 206, 273
 Turkana Rehabilitation Project (1981) 194
 Twareg of Central Nigeria 202, 208
 Uganda 5, 99, 100
 UK, conditional aid 41
 Ulemas 57
 UN, Charter (1945) 1; Conventions 1; Decade for Women (1975-85) 2, 8, 162, 312; Declaration of Human Rights (1948) 1; High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) 61, 62
 Underwood, Barry 281, 282, 295-8
 UNICEF 47, 49, 104, 241; 'Adjustment with a Human Face' 50
 unions, 49, 188, 256; of prostitutes 108; women in 37, 123-4; women in, and participation in public life 161-7
 United Democratic Front (UDF) 122-3
 United Women's Congress (UWCO) 123
 United Women's Organisation (UWO) 122-3
 unpaid work 40, 44, 167, 224
 urban areas, and spread of STDs to rural areas 93, 94
 urbanisation 82, 134; impact of 135
 USA 8-9, 96, 99, 162, 267
 USA, clothing industry 30-1; WID group 163
 USAID 140, 164, 166, 190
 village bus services extension 224, 230
 violence, against women 19, 56, 81, 127-9, 160; towards prostitutes 106-7; women and township 127-8 *see also* domestic violence; rape
 visibility, women's 248
 Wadehra, Renu 268-272
 Wajir, Kenya 204-5
 Wallace, Tina ix-xi, 13-21, 60-7, 79-82, 137-40, 185-9
 Wamalwa, Betty 188, 245-52, 282
 War on Want 14
 war x, 13, 18-19, 54-6, 82, 210
 waste, dumping of hazardous 15, 24-6
 water, access to potable 300
 water projects 190-4; failures 191
 water resources, women's role in managing and maintaining 15, 262
 Watson, Cathy 15, 17, 20, 186
 welfare approach 151, 161-3
 Whitehead, Ann 15, 19-20, 68-78, 186
 Williams, Suzanne 82, 118-31
 women, organising themselves 229, 256-60; triple role of 139, 158-9
 Women in Development (WID) units 157, 163, 166, 312
 women farmers 50, 53, 68, 75, 78, 149, 238, 284
 Women in Nigeria (WIN) 281
 Women's Alternative Economic Summit on Structural Adjustment (1990) 18
 Women's Bureau, Kenya 246, 247
 Women's Bureaux 50
 women's development criteria 151-3, 156-7
 Women's Environmental Network 14
 women's existing knowledge 292-3
 women's groups 8, 187, 188, 207; assessment of movement 247-8; at local level 248-9; benefits for members 250; financial and resource capability 250; goals of 239-40; *harambee* and development 250-1; limitations of 245-52; participation in 249; sociological composition 249-50; structures 240-1
 women's issues, compared with women's concerns 152; criteria for recognising 150-3; defined 138; in development projects 154-7
 women's liberation 291-4
 women's needs, assumptions about 223; basic 179; and revolutions 306-10
 women's rights, and democracy 118-31
 women's work, recognition of 313
 working conditions, changes due to structural adjustment 48-9
 working environment, in FTZs 36
 Working Women's Forum, India 221
 workloads, women's 160, 239, 284-5, 294; psychological consequences of 112-16
 World Bank 17, 50, 166; structural adjustment programmes 41
 World Conference on the Advancement of Women (1985) 8
 Wright, Joan vii-viii
 Yemen 280, 282, 299-305
 Zaire 191
 Zambia 46, 47, 140, 179-80
 Zambia Association for Research and Development Workshop 140, 179-80
 Zimbabwe 95; Women's AIDS Support Network 100

