

**Trade Intensification in Asian
Economies:
*WHAT IT MEANS TO WOMEN'S WORK***

- **WOMEN AND GENDER INSTITUTE**
- **Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era**
- **International Gender and Trade Network**

THE INTERNATIONAL GENDER AND TRADE NETWORK

The International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) was launched after the Strategic Planning Seminar on Gender and Trade held in Grenada from 8 to 11 December 1999. Forty-eight women from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Pacific attended the seminar. The network puts forward the view that gender relations play a critical role in influencing the outcome of macroeconomic and trade policies. Conversely, existing gender biases can act as impediments to the beneficial execution of economic policy.

The IGTN aims to increase the engagement of the global women's movement in the discourse and negotiations on regional and global trade and investment agreements. In order to do so, the network's activities will include the following:

- The survey and conduct of gender and trade research regionally and globally
- To develop appropriate research methodologies for the international network
- To identify regional and global research agendas
- To translate research materials for advocacy and literacy.

IGTN focuses on the World Trade Organization, Free Trade Area of the Americas, LOME Convention and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. The regions continue to focus on other important international agreements and institutions.

The IGTN is made up of seven regions: Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Pacific. Membership of the network is through the regions.

IGTN is seeking accreditation in the World Trade Organization and relevant UN bodies such as the ECOSOC, ILO and UNCTAD.

The Secretariat is housed at the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C., USA.

The project is supported by the Ford Foundation.

International Network on Gender and Trade - Asia

The first workshop of IGTN - Asia took place in Bangkok on October 2000. It was attended by delegates from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand - where the in-country research is being carried out. It was a unique gathering that brought together economists and activists from the labor and women's organizations. After much discussion and debate, the workshop arrived at a research framework- and design, which integrated the central themes and concerns of the participants.

The workshop decided to focus its research on trade agreements and trade policies of the World Trade Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the Asia-Europe Meeting. Its research aims to unravel the complex dynamics of trade and gender as it is played out in three industries: textile and clothing, agriculture and services.

The research will study the impact of trade on gender relations at three levels: the macro (national) economy, the meso (national industries and markets) economy and the micro level. The micro level will look at the impact of trade policy on gender relations in the community and the household.

The workshop also decided that the question of social reproduction and its relationship to economic and trade policies needed to be given central consideration. Therefore at the macro level the social policies of governments had to be given key importance. On the micro level concepts such as income thresholds and social thresholds need to be investigated and the

relationships clarified. The in-country research will also conduct limited primary data gathering in select communities and households in an effort to illustrate and draw out these inter-relationships.

The research will be regionally coordinated with the aim of drawing out regional patterns, issues and challenges, which will be subsequently linked to advocacy. The final output will be the translation of the research in to economic literacy packets aimed at the experienced organizers in labor and women's organizations.

The Asia Secretariat is based in Manila, Philippines. The administration, research and production of the literacy packets are coordinated through the Secretariat.

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ASIAN WOMEN'S WORK IN TRADE-INTENSIVE ECONOMIES

An interrogation of the ongoing re-structuring and intensification of trade in the region's economies from a perspective centered on the range of work performed by Asian women offers a way for linking economic and social policy analyses. Women, after all, traverse the realms of productive and reproductive work, formal and informal sectors, and paid and unpaid labor, all of which are cogs in the wheel of economic and social development.

The socialized work of Asian women

Rarely will one find in Asia at this time women being polarized between those who are exclusively career-oriented and those who are primarily home-oriented, as has emerged in the industrialized North (Hakim 1996). The vast majority, particularly among the poor, straddle through- out their lives between paid work and housework / family obligations. Wage-earning work that is often critical for family survival constitutes only a part of the work Asian women are expected to perform and/or actually carry out. Asian cultures socialize their women to prioritize homemaking and marriage as vital and proper female activities and absolve men of such duties. Human capital formation is thus, permeated with the values and norms of a traditional sexual division of labor.

Asian women's central role in the family-based social network provides the backbone for social welfare and protection throughout the Asian region (Richards 2000). Again, in contrast to the North where the state has institutionalized welfare systems to carry out aspects of reproductive work, Asian governments have heavily capitalized on market / productive activities under the assumption that deficiencies in social welfare spending will be borne by the family and kin system.

Under what conditions do Asian women perform their range of work in the productive-reproductive continuum?

In the formal paid productive sector, trade intensification in Asia has spawned an expansion of feminized lower grade jobs in manufacturing and the services sectors. For these industries, the case has been the creation of feminized employment rather than a de-masculinization of employment. Gosh (UNRISD forthcoming) notes that jobs in certain export-processing zones (EPZA) in South Asia had of late become de- feminized. She further notes that improved labor conditions emerging in some EPZAs had in fact, coincided with, the decrease in the share of women's employment in these places.

A feminized overseas contract work industry provides yet another route for women to earn income. Asian migrants are hired on a temporary basis as domestic servants in private homes or as chambermaids in hotels, workers in sweatshops (often as undocumented workers), and as care-givers for the sick and the elderly for commercialized healthcare systems. Overseas contract work for Asian women is a market and industry created from the upward mobility of families and individual career-oriented women in better performing economies.

Paid work in the informal sector is another area where women workers predominate and in which they perform a multitude of activities, from handicraft and food production to home-based work to tourism-related work. Much of these activities are unrecognized, seasonal, bring in meager incomes, and are not covered by labor protection laws.

Side by side their performance of work in low-paying and insecure employment, poor Asian women have had to perform their reproductive functions amidst an environment that is still reeling from the effects of the recent financial and economic crisis. As state-sponsored social welfare services retreated and the market increasingly given free reign in taking-over the provision of vital services, SUCH as, health, education, housing and basic utilities (privatization

schemes), the burden of family survival and human care fall heavier on women inside families and kin networks. Women's home care work in both crisis and post-crisis Asia had to address as well the demands of caring for many extremely stressed unemployed men. Moreover, there are studies that show unemployed men were less likely to share in housework than if they had a job (Pahl 1984, Brines 1994 cited in Hakim 1996).

When the Asian financial crisis hit Asian economies, country data for the Philippines showed that less women than men were laid off as the service sector that was feminized was resilient to the effects of the crisis (Lim 1999) and that some women took over male jobs because they accepted lower pay, longer working hours and double shift jobs (ILO 1998). Women's paid work, whether in the formal or informal sector, is critical to the economy, particularly during crisis.

Examining the household / family at the nexus of economic and social policies

Positioning the range of women's work at the center of a critical perspective on trade intensification raises the importance of the household / family as a locus for examining the intersection of both trade-related social and market reform policies as these impact on human welfare and individual preferences and interests.

Certain areas need to be looked at and explored. For instance, the negotiating power of women in the social and cultural settings in gender relations within the household / family and the constraints they meet in responding to trade-related policy and market shifts/failures as they struggle for family survival, are worth examining. It likewise becomes necessary to look into whether the above processes deepen or transform the traditional sexual division of labor. Further reflecting, we could also study their implications for trade-related economic and social policy reforms.

To be able to obtain preliminary data and insights into these explorations, the Asia Gender and Trade Project has now launched a five-country study using a framework developed around the concepts of household/family income and social thresholds. This ongoing collaborative work of activists and academics, women's organizations and labor groups is expected to be concluded in the middle of 2001 and its findings shared widely in the succeeding issues of this packet.

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NEGOTIATING THE DIVIDES IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND GENDER

By Marina Fe B. Durano

Many economies have been envious of the Asian tigers' impressive growth rates before the crisis exposed the weaknesses of the Asian model. These envious economies have tried to implement economic programs following the Fast Asian template of export orientation very often encouraged by multilateral institutions, such as the WTO, the IMF and the WB, that have been touting them as market economies exemplars.

Among 34 developing economies in Asia and the Pacific, trade intensity, defined as the share of total exports and imports to gross national product, ranged from 1.5 percent in Myanmar to 247.3 percent in Singapore in 1999. The top third of these economies, considered as the most open economies, had a trade intensity of at least 77.3 percent—that of the Fiji Islands. Between 1980 and 1999, at least 11 economies (out of 21 that had available data) exhibited an increase in trade intensity with the largest increases posted by economies trading intensively, namely, the Philippines, Mongolia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. The relatively less trade intensive economies in South Asia also showed an increase in trade intensity. Even though declines in trade intensity were seen in Singapore, Maldives, and Chinese Taipei, they were still among those economies with high trade intensity in 1999. Many of the economies that exhibited declines in trade intensity were found in the Pacific. Myanmar, a politically troubled country, started with 19.8 percent trade intensity and ended 1999 with only 1.3 percent, almost an autarky.

Trade liberalization was actively pursued so that between 1980 and 1993, weighted average tariffs have gone down from 21.3 percent to 11.6 percent in Latin American and the Caribbean, from 18.2 percent to 14.7 percent in East Asia and 30.2 percent to 21.3 percent (1990 figure) for Sub-Saharan Africa. Non-tariff measures have also declined considerably for Latin America & the Caribbean and East Asia, which had gone down to single-digit levels in the early 1990s.

Trade intensification has been helped along by the establishment of export processing enclaves in economies that wanted to continue promoting import-substitution policies. Or, more comprehensively, the entire incentive system of an economy was shifted towards the promotion of export production and away from the protection of domestic industrialists. Such a move was bolstered by studies that showed the welfare losses associated with the inefficiencies of resource misallocation as well as rent-seeking behavior brought about by protectionist policy.

The export-led growth template associated with the Asian model has already been widely criticized for a number of reasons. Arnsden's (1989) well-known work indicated that government intervention through activist investment policy was just as important in promoting growth in the Fast Asian economies. More broadly, Rodrik (1999) questions the orthodox view that seems to continue to permeate discussions on the role that trade should play in the macroeconomics

of development. He urges policymakers to take a less zealous view of export-oriented production and foreign direct investments since the evidence of their benefits is not convincing¹.

While the data shows that growing economies tend to have an increasing share of exports in the economy, it is not all clear if an increasing export share leads to growth. On the other hand, openness to trade is not altogether bad as it allows for the importation of ideas, goods and services, capital, and institutions" while exports assures payment of these purchases. It is also not clear that foreign direct investment is more beneficial than any other type of investment; it may be that foreign direct investments go to countries that are already productive and profitable.

Global Integration and National Assertions

Opposing views on the role of trade in development force many of us who are the supposed beneficiaries of these policies to think hard and doubly so on what would be the best-and, at the same time, viable-course of action. The key may be found by seeing not only the forest but also the trees that make it. The answer is unlocked not by one key but two, one being ineffective without the other. For starters, globalization means greater international economic integration indeed but this does not have to imply loss of national distinctiveness.

National sovereignty over development priorities ought to be asserted. This assertion will mean that nations facing each other in negotiations on trade and otherwise will have a multitude of interests and preferences because they wish to follow possibly divergent paths to development. Government representatives subjecting their nations to the disciplines resulting from negotiations in multilateral institutions would want to ensure that the same disciplines are appropriate to the objectives of the people and institutions in whose behalf they make commitments. The national leadership's accountability to the peoples they govern necessitates sovereignty in its international dealings.

Sovereignty is all the more important when the state represents the apex of peoples' collective goals and right to self-determination. Women's strategic interests within these are assured the moment gender equality and equity are adopted as goals. This may be achieved through strong national women's machineries, gender mainstreaming in the various bureaucratic organizations, and the active involvement of women citizens in the many aspects of decision making on plans, policies and programs. Governments of most of the Southeast Asian countries have combined the two strategies of forming new structures for gender and initiating gender- mainstreaming programs. Unfortunately, such efforts are not receiving adequate funding from their respective governments and are meeting resistance from some segments of the bureaucracy. (Quesada-Tiongson, 2000)

State and Citizenry

As an expression of people's empowerment, the sovereign state necessarily brings with it the development priorities identified by its peoples. When prioritization follows a democratic process, people's empowerment and democracy become the twin engines that sustain strong sovereign states. Strength comes from the open channels of communication between elite and

marginalized groups; between traditional holders of influence and mobilizable sectors; between those at the top and those at the bottom.

Communication is both voice and ear; it is both speaking and listening. It is an exchange. In many instances of democratic exchange, however, women citizens rarely have voice and most often made to listen. With an empowered women citizenry that is able to resist as well as participate in a democratic process of mobilizing for societal goals, women's struggle for rights and entitlements are effectively articulated.

Women in Asia have raised their voices in various theaters of engagement: in the parliament of the streets through mobilization and direct confrontation; in the ballot boxes through electoral politics carrying the women's agenda; in the halls of government through cooperation and accommodation with groups in power. These engagements have been honed while challenging colonial rule, repressive regimes and patriarchal states. (Ng and Lin, 2000)

Economic Inequalities and Gender Inequalities

Economic inequalities are starker than ever in whatever terms it may be spoken. There is unequal access, unequal ownership, and unequal control over much of the world's resources. The means by which opportunity can be turned to advantage is beyond the reach of a vast number of peoples many of whom are found in developing countries in Asia. Poverty in the face of serious inequality is a priority development issue.

Among the inequalities that must be redressed is the inequality between the genders. Land ownership, inheritance rules, property regulations and marriage laws are some of the most male-biased institutions that deter women from gaining control over their lives as they effectively limit the choices women have in both private and public spheres. Feminist studies have shown that social institutions, including the market and the state are carriers of gender-blindness. Hence, society at large is not a level playing field for women who wish to participate fully and equally in societal processes.

Production and Social Reproduction

It is the engagement of economic agents with the market that is considered a productive activity. These productive activities find a complement in socially reproductive activities, which primarily involves the socialization of children-including investments in health and education and subsistence food production-aimed at ensuring that the succeeding generation is able to perform their expected roles in society when they reach of age.

Development planning has almost always involved the coordination of productive activities by providing economic incentives that encourage the movement of resources toward profitable sectors. In the meantime, the main responsibility for ensuring that reproductive activities are undertaken lay within the home, more specifically, with the women in the home, following the traditional sexual division of labor. Coordination of reproductive activities led by the state has meant the implementation of programs targeted at women,

ensuring that women remain well within the bounds of the household. Such state-led coordination does not transform but, rather, deepen the divide between production and social reproduction.

Viewing productive and reproductive activities as separate spheres leads to stresses and tensions for those who have to move back and forth between both spheres of activity. Elson (1998) had said it best, to wit:

Increasing the aggregate demand for labour through planned development is not guaranteed to produce a balanced distribution between men and women of paid work in production and paid work in social reproduction. Instead, depending upon the composition of aggregate demand for goods and services, it may produce overwork for women as they increase their participation in paid work in production, while continuing to do most of the unpaid work of social reproduction; and at the same time leave men in a debilitating idleness or underemployment as they fail to find 'men's jobs' in paid production but are culturally constrained from undertaking 'women's work' in either production or social reproduction.

Overemphasis in the productive sphere limits possibilities for achieving the human and social development of women because it neglects the sphere in which much of their work is found.

Market Systems and Social Institutions

Trade policy is within the purview of macroeconomics while this discussion has been around institutional considerations. While the market itself is considered an institution, it is unregulated thereby making it vulnerable to capture by the narrow interest of profit. The alternative is to regulate the market, to be held in check by democratic ideals and balanced by social goals.

It is not enough to view macroeconomics as simply the economics of the components of aggregate demand, and, moreover, see it as a question of whether one component is superior over the other. This implies that trade policy cannot be formulated in isolation of the institutional considerations raised above. Rather trade policy should be linked with labor policy and social policy to form a more complete approach to international trade in the context of development.

Consider first the link between trade policy and labor policy. The impact of trade policy is mainly expressed through the employment route, where an increase in foreign demand for exports increases employment in export industries or an increase in domestic demand for imports decrease employment in import-competing industries. The effect on employment, thus, requires a look at what labor policy has in store for the welfare of workers in tradable industries, whether currently employed or recently unemployed.

At the same time, trade policy must also be linked with social policy, from a consideration of the production-reproduction continuum in the range of work. There is a need to look into how the allocation of time and the assignment of responsibilities between the two spheres of work could be realigned and synchronized so that the burdens and opportunities are more equally distributed between men and women. The formulation of social policy should not unduly leave the burden of reproductive work on women alone but must actively promote participation of men in these activities at the same time that trade policy has promoted the participation of women in productive activities.

Global Arrangements: Complementarity and Plurality

The internal stability of an economy can be threatened by external shocks such as the oil price crisis of the 1970s, the debt crisis of the 1980s, and the very recent Asian financial crisis. Policy reactions in such cases require swift and appropriate responses from economic authorities. Given the possibility that such responses would lead to a heightening of social conflict due to their distributional consequences, Rodrik recommends a strengthening of the institutions that manage the shocks. Building up these institutions require three mechanisms: ensuring public trust in the state, opening-up the decision-making process and improving safety nets and social insurance. These mechanisms would indeed be the consequences of the institutional prerequisites outlined above. Furthermore, linking trade policy with labor policy and social policy provides a broader approach to safety nets and social insurance.

The linkages between the three policies must be pursued at the national level as part of a sovereign and democratic state's comprehensive approach to human and social development.

Complementing this at the global level should be diversity in international forums and institutions. Centralism is to be avoided as is inherent in the current global system in which the triumvirate of the WTO-IMF-WB is pre-eminent. In addition, the possibilities of "logrolling" or "vote trading" during negotiations between trade policy and labor policy or between social policy and trade policy will be limited.

The multitude of institutions serves as a "check and balance" mechanism against each other's excesses and against states reneging on their commitments. It is understandable, however, that tensions could arise between and among institutions since conflicting approaches may be used to resolve similar or related matters. Consultation between and among these institutions is best conditional on the assurance that institutions maintain their autonomy. It is not enough that observers from the other institutions are present, as is the current practice. It is necessary to create joint working groups specifically tasked to determine acceptable solutions to issues that may arise.

Conclusion

Citizens and states. National and global. Macro and micro. Forest and trees. It is not that one is better than the other rather that one cannot be without the other.

In determining the role of trade in the macroeconomics of gender-fair development, it will be the nature of the relationship between two seemingly separate entities that will provide the better answer.

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¹ *Winters (2000) points to Frankel and Romer (1999) as Supporting the View that openness stimulates growth together with other previously written studies and to Rodriguez and Rodrik (1999) as criticizing this orthodoxy.*

THE FEMINIZATION OF LABOR IN ASIA

The restructuring and intensification of trade tire contributed to the increase in the share of women in paid employment in several Asian countries. This trend, of the increase in women's share of the labor force, has been described as the 'feminization of labor" (Cagatay and Ozler, 1995).

Women's increased share in the workforce in percentages

Country	1980	1996
China	43	45
Indonesia	38	41
Japan	35	40
Malaysia	34	37
Philippines	35	37

Source: UNIFEM, 2000

*Women comprise a major share of the labor force
in most sectors in the ASEAN economies.*

UNIFEM, 1998

Using cross-country data pooled for 1985 and 1990, Cagatay and Ozler analyze the relationship between women's share of the labor force, the processes of long-term economic development and macroeconomic changes associated with structural adjustment.

The authors state the following: "Our empirical investigation points to a robust relationship between women's share of the labor force and the level of economic development ... At the same time, we have found that demographic as well as cultural/ ideological factors play a role in determining the degree of feminization of the labor force. Our second finding is that, ... structural adjustment policies have led to an increase in feminization via worsening income distribution and increased openness."

Anker (ILO, 1998), provides specific instances by which the feminization of labor in Asia has occurred.

These include:

- Women entering, generally for the first time, particular sectors of the economy where the labor force has been traditionally male dominated.

In China and Hong Kong there were big increases in the feminization of the traditionally male, sales supervisor occupation in the two decades from 1970-1990.

- Sex-segregation of occupations - where women are traditionally employed in certain occupations and not in others.

There have been increases in the feminization of typically female occupations of bookkeepers, cashiers and related workers, as well as hairdressers, barbers etc, in the Asia/Pacific region between 1970-1990.

- The changing nature of certain occupations which have been traditionally, almost exclusively female occupations (such as sewing and some handicrafts), that get drawn into the emergent export industries e.g. from sewing in the household to employment in apparel manufacture.

There are large increases for several small study economies that pursued an export, oriented development path. There was a large increase in the feminization of the occupation of tailors, dressmakers, sewers, etc. for Hong Kong from 64% to 73% between 1971 and 1981.

The most important examples of these emergent industries are the low-skill, high-export oriented, labor-intensive manufacturing industries, such as textiles and clothing, as well as some sectors of the service industry. Agriculture, which remains an important arena of women's work, has traditionally been feminized. As a feminized sector it is differentially impacted on by shifts linked to the internationalization of agriculture for exports and for trade.

Durano (2000) proposes categorizing, in three ways, export-oriented employment in which feminization has been most marked:

- First and most general is to look at employment in firms geared for export production. *In the Philippines in the firms surveyed between 1993 and 1997, export oriented firms in all industries including agriculture employed about one fifth of the male workers and about one third of the female workers.*
- The second refers specifically to workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), which is essentially a subset of the first category. *In the export industries of South East Asia women account for more than 80% of the work force (ILO, 1995).*
- The third approach expands the concept to include temporary overseas work migration, i.e. the export of labor which is a combination of policies designed to encourage the export of labor and the attraction of the "good life" overseas. *More and more women are migrating on their own, or as the primary earner in their household, but often as temporary workers in low-paid jobs (UNIFEIM, 2000).*

The Range of Women's Work

Formal Sector Work

The formal sector covers a range of women's productive work that is paid for. The main types are:

- Paid work in the public sector such as health, education, public administration and defense.
- Paid work in the private sector. For most women paid work in the private sector is low-paid and labor-intensive.

Informal Sector Work

There are many linkages between the formal sector and the informal sector. In several cases big companies in the private sector are linked to the informal sector through subcontracted labor. The informal sector includes both the paid and unpaid work of women. The main types are.

- Paid work in sweatshops and homebased enterprises (such as those prevalent in the textiles and clothing industries), manual service work in firms and private homes, market and street vendors, and girl-children and women in vulnerable occupations in the global sex and tourism industries.

- The unpaid work of women working for family farms and businesses producing their own subsistence consumption and for the market (also known as "unpaid family workers"). Unpaid women family workers are prevalent in the agricultural sector.
 - Women who are self-employed or employers (also known as "own-account workers").
- The informal sector accounts for well over half of urban employment in Asia and if agriculture is included, then three quarters of total employment- in Asia. (UNIFEM, 2000)

Reproductive Work

The paid reproductive work of women straddles both the private and public areas in the formal sector via the delivery of a range of services.

Most of women's reproductive work revolves around their own families and is unrecognized and unpaid for. But this is not exclusively the case. Other reproductive tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare can also take the form of paid domestic labor in the informal sector. Other reproductive tasks can take the form of paid work done in the formal sector, such as the delivery of healthcare service through public health programs and in private and public hospitals.

However, it's important to note that women's reproductive work is not only a matter of tasks, as it also centrally involves a great deal of emotional tending of the needs of family and community members.

WOMEN'S TIME AND LABOR – DOUBLE SHIFT & MULTIPLE BURDENS

Permeating neo-liberal economic thinking is an unstated assumption - of the separation between women's paid work in the market and unpaid work in the household. But for most Asian women their paid work and their unpaid work are closely tied together, and this is the case whether they are employed full-time in industry, services or agriculture.

Poor Asian women are rarely ever "out of work" in their lives. Even when women are employed outside the home in full-time employment, the entire burden of the housework continues to fall on their shoulders. Thus women have to work a "double shift" and carry the responsibility of a "double burden" of labor.

In Asia and the Pacific women work longer hours than men. They work twelve hours more per week performing both paid and unpaid labor. (UNIFEM, 2000)

TABLE 1
Gender based burden of work time

Countries	Year	Females Hours per day	Males Hours per day	Females as % of Males
<i>Urban Areas</i>				
Indonesia	1992	6.6	6.1	109
Nepal	1978	9.7	9.2	105
<i>Rural Areas</i>				
Bangladesh	1990	9.1	8.3	110
Nepal	1978	10.7	9.1	117
Philippines	1975-77	9.1	7.5	121
<i>National</i>				
Korea, Rep	1990	8.1	8.0	102

Source of basic data: Human Development Report 2000
Note: Market activities refer to market-oriented production activities
As defined by the 1993 revised UN-Systems of National Accounts

TABLE 2
Gender based time allocation in percentages

Countries	Year	Market-Activities		Non-Market Activities	
		Market Activities	Non-Market Activities	Females	Males
<i>Urban areas</i>					
Indonesia	1992	60	40	35	36
Nepal	1978	58	42	25	67
<i>Rural Areas</i>					
Bangladesh	1990	52	48	35	70
Nepal	1978	56	44	46	67
Philippines	1975-77	73	27	29	84
<i>National</i>					
Korea, Rep	1990	45	55	34	56

Table I indicates that far greater numbers of women work longer hours per day compared to men. Across Asian economies almost double the number of women than men were working longer hours per day. Table 2 indicates that women spend far more time than men performing activities associated with their reproductive tasks and unpaid family work, i.e. in what is referred to in the table as 'non-market' activities.

Women's double-burden and the time allocated to reproductive tasks will impact differentially depending on a range of factors (Philippine Human Development Report, 1997).

These include:

- Demographic variables, such as the number of children and their ages
- The flexibility of her work schedule
- The family resources such as her partners income and overall wealth owned
- Her own market wage and/or income
- The presence of relatives who can share the household tasks
- The availability and her accessibility of labor saving devices such as washing machines, gas and/or electric stoves
- The availability and accessibility of utilities, such as water and electricity, and basic services

If she has older children, and especially daughters, the burden gets spread around. This also applies to older female relatives in the house, such as mothers, grandmothers and aunts, who are called on to look after children and perform other household tasks.

If she has sufficient income, some of these reproductive services can be purchased, through the hiring of domestic workers and other service providers, and through the purchase of labor saving devices.

For poor Asian women, in particular for women in rural areas, the lack of utilities and basic services intensifies their double-burden as they are forced to spend longer hours performing household tasks such as fetching and carrying water and collecting firewood for fuel.

Table 3
**The Share of women headed households
To total households in percentages**

Country	Women headed households 1991/97
Bangladesh	9
Hong Kong, China	27
India	9
Indonesia	13
Malaysia	18
Nepal	13
Pakistan	7*
Philippines	11*
Korea, Rep	17
Vietnam	32*

Source: The World's Women 2000
Note: * Refers to a year between 1985 and 1990

The global trend of increasing numbers of female-headed households has emerged in Asia as well. For these women the double burden is intensified.

While formal sector employment has provided Asian women with income and time away from the drudgery of housework, they nonetheless remain conscious of their place as earners for the family and undertakers of household chores. Case studies also found that returned female migrant workers resumed their household tasks upon integrating back in the family, despite an efficient task sharing system put up by family members left behind, and while away, worry over the welfare of their family members.

Formal Work

Quality of employment in feminized sectors:

ILO reports indicate that along with the feminization of labor in the Asian region, serious gender-based inequalities have emerged and continue to persist

- The 'gender gap' in wages

The gender-segregation of the work force has been accompanied by a structured inequality in the wage levels of Asian women and men.

TABLE 1
**Female wages as a percentage of male wages
 In manufacturing, circa 1997**

Country	Wages
Malaysia	58
Myanmar	96
Korea, Rep	56
Singapore	60
Sri Lanka	85
Thailand	68

Source: UNIFEM, 2000

In some South East Asian economies these wage differentials are starting to decrease. In South Korea the change in female wages as a percentage share of male wages increased from 44% to 62% in 1980,1997. But as this more positive process occurred, trends show that the share of women employed in some of the feminized sectors have also started to decline. As women benefit from improved wages and conditions their 'attractiveness' to employers declined.

Job security

The job security of women in the region has tended to be unstable. Asian women are more likely to be retrenched than men. In the manufacturing and services sectors labor shedding is a common practice (ILO, 2000).

In manufacturing and service establishments, there is also evidence of keeping women workers in a "trainee" category for relatively long periods, not to provide them with training but for greater employment flexibility and to keep wages low.

Working Conditions

In the manufacturing and services sectors, industrial work has often exposed women to exploitative working conditions and occupational health and safety problems on the job. Comparative studies on working conditions in sex-segregated occupations, such as those undertaken by Durano in the Philippines (1997), reveals certain issues that further research could investigate. These are:

- Men may face a higher risk to physical disability than women. There may be a greater risk to permanent total or partial disability for men while women may face greater risk in temporary partial disability. - Women face risks to health through possibly toxic substances more than physical hazards.
- Women's occupations may tend to have negative effects on eyesight while men's occupations tend to expose them to noise. - Women may face a greater number of stress sources than men mainly because of sexual harassment in the workplace and the "double burden".
(Philippine Human Development Report, 1997)

In many countries hit by the economic ravages of the 1980s and 1990s, women, especially very poor women, are now working 60- 90 hours a week just to try to maintain their living standards (ILO, 2000).

Social Protection and Benefits

There has been a decline in social protection for women workers in the region. Women have been more adversely affected than men by the limited coverage of social security programs, including insurance against unemployment, old age, sickness, benefits for family support, health care, education, etc. Cutbacks in health care, sickness and maternity benefits have hit women particularly hard because they bear the responsibility for the family's health and survival (ILO, 2000).

The attitude of trade unions to women workers:

Labor rights and standards are important to achieving gender equality and offsetting gender biases in the labor market. However, traditional union strategies tend to be based on gender-biased notions, such as the myth that the primary breadwinner is always the male. Trade unions also do not take into account the fact that women are over-represented in sectors harder to organize, such as tourism and the informal sectors.

Trade unions can no longer continue to assume the primacy of the "male breadwinner" among workers and need to integrate more fully into their program the wide variety of issues arising from the feminization of labor. They also need to take into account other problems that confront women workers, such as their inability to participate in union activities due to their double burden in the household.

Informal Work

Lack of recognition and welfare:

Informal work includes work in sweatshops and homebased subcontracting, domestic labor, and family work. The type of work women perform in this sector is often under-recognized and tends to be under-counted, especially when it is unpaid. It also lacks the welfare benefits found, even in limited form, in formal work, such as health insurance, and any semblance of job security.

The increase of women in the informal sector has meant that coverage via conventional social security schemes, either public or private, is increasingly inadequate. The under-recognized nature of work in this sector makes it impervious to traditional forms of union organization.

Women and girl children in vulnerable occupations:

The proportion of women and girl children in vulnerable occupations has been linked to the spread of the global sex and tourism industries reflected in many Asian economies.

Small-scale studies reveal that women in vulnerable occupations suffer random violence, and due to the prevailing social stigma, have no recourse to legal guarantees and services. With the alarming increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Asia, prostituted women and children live with the constant threat of being its next victims. Despite such life-threatening health problems these women and girl children have virtually no access to adequate healthcare services - preventive or otherwise.

Erosion of women's livelihoods:

Women perform a large proportion of the informal work in agriculture, such as in the case of unpaid family workers. The influx of food imports and land conversions linked to trade liberalization in agriculture has led to the large-scale displacement of women and women's subsistence crops in agricultural production.

Reproductive Work

Reproductive and sexual health of women:

Women who perform paid work in the formal and informal production sectors find themselves working long hours, resulting in greater personal stress and pressure on the quality of care they provide to families and communities. It also means the loss of time for her own leisure and recreational needs.

Under these conditions the tendency is to transfer some of women's reproductive tasks to other female members of the house- hold - usually very young or old female siblings and women relatives.

TABLE 2
Indicators on Childbearing

Country	Contraceptive use, Married women (%) 1991/1998	Total fertility rate (births per woman) Five-year average or 1995-2000	Births per 1000 women, aged 15-19 Five-year average for 1995-2000
China	83	1.8	5
Korea, Rep	62	2.1	2
India	41	3.1	112
Indonesia	57	2.6	58
Laos	19	5.8	104
Malaysia	48	3.2	25
Pakistan	18	5.0	90
Philippines	47	3.6	43
Thailand	74	1.7	70

Source: *The World's Women, 2000*

Note: The total fertility rate is defined as the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her childbearing years and bear children at each age in accordance with age-specific fertility rates. Births per 1000 women aged 15-19 refers to the number of children born alive in one year per 1000 women aged 15-19.

The lack of women's control over their sexuality and reproduction, coupled with inadequate availability of reproductive health including abortion services in several countries in the region, are major factors that worsen women's reproductive work burden.

For instance, infant mortality rates continue to remain issues of major concern for women in Asia. Infant mortality rates in the low and middle-income countries of South Asia were more than twelve times higher than those for high-income countries worldwide (World Development Report, 2000). As Table 2 indicates there are significant differences in the use of contraceptives by women, ranging from high levels of usage in China and South Korea to very low levels of usage in Pakistan and Laos. Some of these differences can be attributed to religious and other cultural factors that continue to have a major impact on women's reproductive rights and therefore their reproductive health.

Non-recognition of family care work:

While women are even glorified as wives and mothers in Asian societies, and their family care work is held in high esteem, this high regard is not translated into economic and political advantages either inside or outside the household.

One of the manifestations of this is governments skewed priorities when it comes to economic development. Resources are siphoned off to provide concessions to TNCs in trade and investments and even military expenditure, while basic services, such as hospitals and schools, suffer cutbacks. The cost of social reproduction continues to be borne by women's unpaid and unrecognized reproductive work.

TABLE 3
Public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP

Country	Data for the most recent Year available 1990-1997
Cambodia	07
China	.1
Indonesia	.7
Korea, Rep	.3
Lao PDR	.3
Malaysia	.4
Pakistan	.8
Philippines	.3
Singapore	.5
Thailand	.0

Source: The World Development Report 1999 / 2000

Table 3 indicates that for several Asian countries public expenditure on health is low, and falls below that of the world's (weighted) average of 2.5% of GDP. Studies have also found that within countries these expenditures are distributed unequally between rich and poor and between urban and rural areas.

WOMEN & TRADE IN TEXTILES AND CLOTHING

Trade in textiles and clothing is a relatively small share of world trade, only 6.3% in 1995. However, it is of enormous importance to developing countries.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (FSCAP) member countries account for almost 60% of total world exports in textiles and clothing. The largest proportion of this comes from Asia.

ESCAP Textile and Clothing Exports – 1993

Exports from	To the rest of the world In millions of US dollars	% share of world trade
East Asia	74,490	41
ASEAN	18,202	10
South Asia	14,397	8
Oceania	80	30
ESCAP region		
Subtotal	107,870.1	60
World	180,977	100%

Source: ESCAP, 1996

The industry is one of the largest employers in the world and in the region. The majority of those employed in the industry are women (Maria Riley, 1999). In Bangladesh, for instance, 70% of all women in wage employment are found in the garment industry (UNCTAD 1999). The report mentions Indonesia, Philippines, the South Korea and Taiwan as having the same characteristics.

The textiles and clothing industry one of the most important examples of the feminization of labor in the Asian region (UNDP, Cagatay 1996).

Today the industry is characterized by the following:

- It is dominated by giant retailers and super-label companies mostly from the industrialized countries. They create the design and then contract out production to manufacturing contractors all over the world. An example of this is Nike, which is the fourth most profit- able clothing company in the world.

*All Nike shoes and some 70% of its apparel are sourced
in Asia, mainly Indonesia, China and Vietnam.
Women Working Worldwide, 2000*

- The industry is highly competitive and is driven by the need to produce at the lowest costs. Labor remains the easiest cost-cutting measure and the producers are always looking for ways to cut labor costs.
- The manufacturers compete for the contracts and guarantee delivery within the required production costs and delivery time.

- This model has created a variety of production sites, including small industrial units, sweat shops, sub-contracting in the informal sector and homebased production. There is a high level of mobility in the industry with manufacturers moving between production units and countries as they seek the most profitable deal (Maria Riley, 1999).
- Whatever the production site, the life of the women workers is characterized by low-pay, long hours, seasonal work, job insecurity and often unsafe working conditions.

*Increased trade in textiles and clothing
is a mixed blessing or curse from
the point of view of women workers.
Maria Riley, 1999*

WTO Agreements

International trade policy today is guided by the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) which went in to effect on January 1, 1995. The ATC attempts to bring trade in textiles and clothing in line with WTO rules.

The ATC was negotiated to phase out all restrictions to imports on textiles and clothing (or quotas), over a ten-year period, ending in 2005. The quotas were previously imposed under the Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) which had been in effect since 1974. The MFA enabled the industrialized countries to impose restrictions or quotas on cotton imports (expanded to include almost all types of fabrics and clothing). The MFA was seen to be advantageous to industrialized countries to protect their local industries.

Many developing countries entered the negotiations with the goal of completely eliminating the MFA and the ATC was adopted as a compromise. The ATC is a three-stage process that aims to integrate trade restrictions on textiles and clothing into the regular scope of WTO negotiations.

The ATC is part of the global process of trade liberalization. However, unlike most liberalization processes, the ATC is seen as working in the interests of the developing countries, increasing their access to previously protected Northern markets.

However, there has been criticism of the implementation of the ATC. The ATC allows for nearly half of the phasing out process to take place in the final stages. There is legitimate concern that the industrialized countries, namely the US, Canada and Europe will take advantage of delaying the phase out of quotas. They have been strongly criticized for deliberately holding back the process (Maria Riley, 1999).

*The spirit of the ATC has not been honored so far and there is a very
real chance that industrialized countries will find ways of introducing
new form of protectionism in 2005. WWW, 2000*

Who Benefits?

Which countries in the region are likely to benefit from the ATC? Various studies show that in general most countries will gain through an increase in trade (Riley, 1999). Asia is expected to benefit, with something like a 6% increase in trade (Majmudar 1996, Yang 1994).

However, there will still be some losers. The difference will be determined by the relative competitiveness of different countries. This will depend on key factors such as wage costs; supply of fabrics; yarn and other materials; infrastructure for transport and marketing and proximity to markets (Riley, 1999).

The countries likely to gain the most are China, India, followed by Pakistan and South Korea. Studies show that the reasons for this range from: low labor costs (India and Pakistan); higher levels of technology at the high-end of the market (South Korea); to China which will benefit from both low labor costs as well as Hong Kong's established financial and marketing infrastructure (VINM, 2000).

Smaller economies such as Bangladesh, however, are likely to lose out. The smaller economies had special trade concessions under the MFA. These concessions will be lost and it will be harder for the smaller economies to compete in a quota-free environment (Riley, VAVW). Countries which depend on imported fabrics or on external marketing groups such as Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Philip- pines will also probably lose (Riley, 1999).

Studies indicate that a more liberalized trading system will enable transnational companies to become even more flexible and mobile in their movements between countries as they seek out greater profits where they can find them, i.e., the ATC will cause a major relocation of garment production between North and South and within the South itself. The poorer countries (generally the weaker producers) could lose their entire textiles and clothing industry (WWW, 2000).

Countries will compete to attract these mobile producers to locate within their borders. The main beneficiaries will be Northern based companies who will benefit from fewer restrictions on their operations (WWW, 2000).

What about Women?

Textile and clothing women workers worldwide will be the primary losers, caught in the competing forces that will continue to restructure the industry. There will be pressure to reduce wages and extend hours. Job insecurity and flexibilization will be a constant threat.

Women garment workers in China typically work 10-14 hours a day, seven days a week and gross neglect of industrial safety has resulted in numerous factory fires.
WWW, 2000

In Bangladesh, which is a likely loser from the ATC, where the garment industry represents 73.3% of the country's total export industry, the future of thousands of women workers is extremely uncertain.
WWW, 2000

For many of the women who could lose their jobs, reintegration back into village life is not a viable option. The impact of the job loss will also be felt by these women's families who rely on their income for survival.

Issues

Studies show that in general the liberalization of trade in the textiles and clothing industries will have a negative and potentially even a devastating impact on the livelihoods of women and their families.

In dealing with this challenge the international women's movement has to deal with many conflicting agendas. Some of these are (Yanz et al 1999, ASEM 2000 women's workshop):

- "Social clauses being a part of trade agreements. Will they really address women's needs or are they yet another cover for protectionist measures by the industrialized countries?"

- The conflict between women workers between North and South as well as within the South as they are forced to compete for the same low-paid, low- skilled, insecure and unsafe jobs.

Recent studies and gathering of women have raised a range of policy options that need to be investigated further. These include:

- Industry-wide Codes of Conduct - based within individual countries, across countries based on regional trading blocs and even global Codes of Conduct.
- Corporate disclosure on labor-related activities such as wages being paid to workers in relation to overall profits made by the big textile and clothing transnationals.
- Government intervention through legislation and policies to combat sweat shops.
- Trade and investment support of countries with fair labor practices.

WOMEN & TRADE IN SERVICES

In several Asia Countries the emergent service sector has experienced the feminization of the labor force in the last two decades. This has been particularly marked in Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Phillipines and Singapore where women comprise the majority of the labor force in the services industry (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Percentage of the Economically Active
Population in Services

	1980		1990		1998	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Bangladesh	5	29	7	26	15	35
Cambodia	14	23	14	24	-	-
China, People's Rep of	10	14	11	14	-	-
Hong Kong, China	43	52	66	60	87	70
India	8	22	11	24		
Indonesia	32	29	31	31	42	39
Korea, Rep of	37	37	49	45	67	55
Lao PDR	13	16	14	17		
Malaysia	33	44	52	48	57	46
Pakistan	15	29	15	34	23	39
Philippines	47	25	56	29	61	35
Sri Lanka	31	35	35	44	29	40
Taipei, China	42	43				
Thailand	18	20	23	21	34	28
Vietnam	15	13	16	13		

Source: ADB, 2000.

The service sector today is marked by a hugely heterogeneous array of activities. These can range from domestic services, tourism, retail, small scale commerce, to health and education provided by the government and private sectors, to 'modem' services in telecommunications, information processing, finance and business services and others. To varying degrees they all include migrant labor - from the low-skill, low-paid migrant labor to high paid consultants (law, accounting, management and other such consultancies) providing a range of public and private sector services.

Tourism and retail services tend to predominate in many Asian countries. Many women in the tourist industry are more likely to be found in the informal sector, rather than the formal sector where wages tend to be higher. The informal sector in tourism includes such activities as laundry, cooking and prostitution (UNCTAD, 1999).

The United Republic of Tanzania, Maldives, Cambodia, Nepal an Uganda are a few examples of LDCs (Least Developed Countries) which have achieved the highest international tourism receipts, accounting for over half of the total of such receipts for all LDCs in recent years. UNCTAD, 1999.

Since at least the mid-1980s some South East Asian countries have become established centers for processing data transactions of credit card providers, mail order businesses, airlines and rail systems. More recently countries such as India are now entering this field. Countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore have become established finance and business service centers. In India service sector industries such as information processing and computer software industries are rapidly growing (Joekes, 1999).

Gender Gaps in Wages

While evidence shows a persistence of the gender gap in wages (see Table 2), research has also shown a narrowing of this wage gap in some Asian countries in the last two decades. In South Korea, Sri Lanka and Singapore, for example, there has been a narrowing of the gender gap in wages between 1980 and 1997 (see Table 3).

TABLE 2
Female wages as a percentage of
male wages in Industry and Services

Korea, rep	62
Singapore	76
Sri Lanka	90
Thailand	72

TABLE 3
The change in female wages as a % of male wages
In Industry and Services

	1980	1997
South Korea	44	62
Singapore	63	74
Sri Lanka	88	90

Source: UNIFEM, 2000

Although there is a common perception that in the service industry the gender gap in wages is not present this is not necessarily the case. The heterogeneous nature of the industry means that women are dominant in certain occupations, i.e. domestic work, compared to others, i.e. management consultancies. This sex-segregation of workforce contributes to the gender gap in wages.

WTO Agreements

The global trade in services is covered by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the WTO. The service sector was once considered a non-trade sector. GATS, however, for the first time sets global rules on trade and investment in services. Under GATS services include: advertising, audio-visual services, banking and finance, communications, construction, data processing, education, environmental services, health care

services, insurance, professional services, retail and wholesale trade, transportation and services.

Trade in services include:

- Services provided by one member country to another (such as telephone calls)
- Services supplied in the territory of one member to the consumers of any other (such as tourism)
- Services provided through the presence of a commercial entity of one member in the territory of another (such as banking)
- Services provided by individuals of one member country in the territory of another (such as consultants)

Under GATS trade in services is liberalized. This means that WTO member countries are required to open their domestic markets to foreign service providers and to make a commitment to treat them under the same terms and conditions as it treats its domestic suppliers.

The liberalization of services is an issue of much significance to developing countries. In the post-colonial era following the Second World War, it was a matter of pride for the newly independent nations to fill job positions and provide services through the development of national resources. GATS directly reverses this trend. (UNIFEM, 2000)

GATS creates a 'level playing field' in which local service providers in the developing countries have to compete fiercely with foreign service providers from the industrialized countries. In areas such as telecommunications and banking they are forced to compete with powerful transnationals based in the industrialized countries. This is likely to place domestic service providers in the developing countries at a disadvantage.

Its impact on women

Through the liberalization of services, women's disadvantaged position is likely to be exacerbated by an increase in the number of competitors for scarce and desirable jobs.
UNIFEM, 2000

Many women also have small and medium size businesses in the service sector. As the competition increases their businesses are likely to suffer.

GATS will also affect women via the impact it has on labor migration. GATS coverage includes the migration of peoples that is considered a trade in services. But the liberalization of trade in services under GATS applies only to certain categories of people. GATS excludes workers who are not employed by a transnational company or who are not professional with recognized qualifications.

Among the restrictions placed by countries on the entry of labor is the requirement of an Economics Needs Test (ENT). According to this test, a foreigner cannot take on the job if a national is available for the same job in the country applying the test. The ENT, therefore, acts as a quota restriction on the movement of labor (UNCTAD Secretariat, 1996).

Many workers who are a part of the massive global migration that is taking place today, fall outside of the narrow categories of professionals or highly skilled workers, employees of transnational corporations, or occupations not covered by the ENT. Therefore, critics argue, that GATS contains provisions that constrain labor migration.

This has a direct impact on women. For increasing numbers of women globalization has meant international migration. Although men outnumber women in the total number of adults who have migrated to another country, from 1985 to 1990, the number of women increased at a

faster rate than the number of men (UNDP, 1999). More and more women are migrating, but often as temporary workers in low-paid jobs.

*In the Philippines women migrants outnumber the men
by a ratio of 12 to 1 as migrants to Asian countries.
In Indonesia 3 to 1. In Sri Lanka 3 to 2.
(ILO 1995)*

Since the 1970s the industrialized countries have increased barriers to permanent migration especially of unskilled workers from the South. In contrast to the dismantling of barriers to the international mobility of capital, barriers to the mobility of labor have remained strong, except for professional people with skills that are relevant to high-tech industries (UNDP, 1999).

The tourist industry has led to the increase in prostitution in many Asian countries. Therefore its impact is to degrade women in terms of the quality of employment opportunities available. It also tends to displace local workers from their traditional work in the agricultural sector as land is used for tourism projects, thus endangering food security.

Its impact on women's health can be devastating, especially with the rise in HIV/AIDS. The spread of HIV/AIDS is often associated with the expansion of tourism. In Asia the incidence of HIV/AIDS has doubled since 1994 (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Prevalence of HIV/AIDS (at the end of 1997)

Country	Women with HIV/AIDS as a % of Ratio of adults with HIV/AIDS
Bangladesh	15
Cambodia	50
China	12
Hong Kong, China	39
India	24
Indonesia	25
Korea, Rep	13
Lao PDR	52
Malaysia	20
Nepal	40
Pakistan	19
Philippines	30
Sri Lanka	30
Thailand	38
Vietnam	20

Source: UNIFEM, 2000

Issues

The trade liberalization of the service sector has opened up the economies of the developing countries to fierce competition from service providers in the industrialized world. This puts the service providers in developing countries, many of which are small and medium size businesses owned by Asian women, at a disadvantage.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services contains provisions that restrict labor migration. This will impact negatively on Asian women who are migrating in larger numbers as temporary workers in low-paying jobs.

The rise in HIV/AIDS poses a major social problem of crisis proportions in many Asian countries. A large proportion of the victims are women. Preventative measures, relating to health and education programs are an urgent requirement. However, the reluctance of many governments in the region to even acknowledge the scope of the problem, prevents effective strategies from being adopted, thus having a devastating impact on many women's health and survival and the health and survival of their families.

WOMEN AND TRADE IN AGRICULTURE

Agricultural production, conventionally, has been considered to be a male dominated activity. However, research done on has shown that for some time now that it's women who have traditionally played a central role in agricultural production. According to UNIFEM (2000), 50% of Third World women plough and level land and 70% are involved in planting, tilling and harvesting.

In South and South East Asia 60% of the work in agriculture and food production is done by women. UNFEM, 2000

TABLE 1
Share, in percentages, of the Economically Active
Population in Agriculture by Sex

	1980		1990		1998	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Bangladesh	61	67	74	59	78	54
Cambodia	80	70	78	69	-	-
China, People's Rep of	79	71	76	69	-	-
India	83	63	74	59	-	-
Indonesia	56	59	56	54	42	41
Korea, Rep of	39	31	20	16	14	11
Lao PDR	82	77	81	76	-	-
Malaysia	49	36	26	28	15	21
98	91	98	98	91	-	-
Pakistan	73	56	72	45	66	41
Philippines	37	61	31	54	27	47
Sri Lanka	55	48	43	37	49	38
Thailand	74	68	65	63	50	52
Vietnam	75	71	73	70	-	-

Source: ADB, 2000.

The above figures indicate that in the last two decades there has been a decline in the proportion of both men and women participating in agricultural production in some Asian countries. Researchers argue that this is due to the restructuring of national economies and agricultural production. Nevertheless women still continue to have a significant share of the labor force that remains in the agricultural sector.

Critics claim that data gathered in this area continues to under, report women's participation in agricultural activities, especially those involving food production and processing for household consumption. Under-reporting of tasks done by women may be traced to the tendency to view women's work as secondary or ancillary to men's activities. Even the World Bank recognized that 44 women's labor force participation continues to be strongly influenced by gender differences in the definition of work ... This is particularly relevant in the informal sector and in agriculture." (World Development Report, 1998)

WTO Agreements

National policy governing agricultural production has had the objective of ensuring food security. Trade policy in agriculture has meant that many countries will have to restructure the industry to accommodate export-oriented, large-scale commercial agricultural production and compete with imported agricultural products as protective tariffs and subsidies are removed.

Trade liberalization in agriculture is governed by the Agreement on Agriculture under the WTO. The Agreement committed WTO members:

- To open up their domestic markets to imported agricultural commodities including food stuffs. The Agreement has liberalized the importation of a wide range of agricultural commodities, thereby opening the economies of the developing countries to an influx of food imports.
- To reduce any subsidies providing support to domestic producers (such as financial subsidies). Domestic subsidies for developing countries were to be cut by 13.3% over a ten-year period for developing countries and by 20% over six years for industrialized countries.

These commitments were to be implemented between 1995 and 2000 and a new round of negotiations is now due.

According to a 1999 study done by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), under the Agreement, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Thailand were some of the countries in Asia that experienced a surge of imported food products. In Sri Lanka this led to sharp drop in rural employment with some 300,000 job losses in the production of onions and potatoes. Thailand was the only country from this grouping to increase its agricultural exports.

Several studies show that trade liberalization policies have eroded domestic agricultural production and severely undermined food security in the developing countries. It has also led to massive displacement of small farmers due to bankruptcy and the displacement of agricultural workers through, job losses.

The government of the Philippines ... has liberalized trade and allowed the import of more sugar ... But when imports from an efficient, low-cost source suddenly started going in to a country that is an inefficient producer, it was small farmers and sugar workers of the Philippines who paid the price - over 400,000 people. Because they are among the poorest sections of the country's population, their food security is at stake.
John Madely, 2000

Given the central role of women in agriculture this has seriously undermined the livelihoods of women, especially women in the rural areas, as well as the very survival of their households, communities and societies (UNIFEM, 2000).

Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), is another WTO agreement that has far reaching implications for agricultural production in Asia. Because of rules on the patenting of products, micro-organisms, and new plants, it has a direct bearing on food production and food security (as well as on drugs and pharmaceutical products).

Developing countries must now observe product patents (rather than process patents) and patents on micro-organisms, which will inhibit them from producing the same product better, or more safely and cheaply. This could lead to the monopoly by multinational corporations of agrochemical products, bio-fertilizers, and bio-pesticides. Some flexibility is allowed for developing countries through the use of a sui generis system of plant protection but it would be important to include farmers' rights in the system rather than just limiting the rights to breeders.

Rural women tend to carry the traditional knowledge of seeds and plants and their usage in a range of activities, ranging from food production to traditional medicines for maintaining the health and well being of their families and communities. The impact of TRIPS on Asian women's 'ownership' and rights over this knowledge is very real and needs to be investigated further.

A million hectares in India and three-quarters of a million in Pakistan are planted out to basmati varieties. Cultivated by hundreds of thousands of small farmers the rice has been grown for centuries in the two countries with farmers selecting and maintaining the varieties. In India alone, basmati exports were valued at US\$ 425 million in 1998/9. In September 1997, the Texas-based RiceTec Inc. won a controversial US patent on Basmati rice.
(Madely, 2000)

Women's Land Rights

Land is fundamental in agriculture and a majority of the poor in the rural areas still do not have any rights to it. Poor rural women have been even further excluded and marginalized. Land control would cover a range of decisions made with respect to the use of the land, such as:

- What crops to plant,
- What and how much inputs to use,
- On whom to hire,
- On how much to sell,
- Control over returns.

Even when women's rights to own land and property are formally recognized by law, these rights have often been ignored or denied due to a number of gender biased cultural factors, such as the myth' of the male-headed household.

Women face the added difficulty of having their requests for land mediated through men. Even the use of small plots must be granted by a husband, inherited from a father or requested from male village elders. If women have their own plots, they are usually small, dispersed, remote and Less fertile.
FAO, 1997

Issues

There is increasing evidence to show that agricultural production has traditionally been feminized. However, due to gender prejudice and gender blindness which underrates or virtually ignores women's unpaid reproductive work in the household, such as the growing and processing of food for household consumption, women's labor in agricultural production is under-reported.

Trade liberalization in agriculture, carried out under the WTO, undermines agricultural production in the developing countries. Further more it threatens the livelihoods of rural women agricultural laborers, including the very survival of their households and communities.

Women's ownership and control over land - central to agricultural production - has traditionally been marginalized and continues to be marginalized today. One of the main reasons for this is cultural prejudices that are gender biased. According to critics this has a negative impact on agricultural production and food security.

...governments and policy advisors alike have to stop thinking of international economic integration as an end in itself. Developing nations have to engage the world economy on their own terms, not on terms set by global markets or multinational institutions.

Dani Rodrik (1999)
The New Global Economy and Developing Countries; Making
Openness Work
Economic Development Policy Essay No. 24, Washington DC:
Overseas Development Conference

Trade policy has the potential of influencing an economy's long run growth path (Shaw 1992). But trade policies are also clearly second best for this purpose. Until such time as the more recent propositions on growth have been adequately verified, the basic role for trade policy would seem to be one of keeping open the channels through which international spillovers might flow.

Rod Flavey (1994)
Paper presented at the Third ADB Conference on Development
Economics, Manila, Philippines, 23 – 25 November 1994.