

Commission on the Status of Women

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PANEL I

**Eradicating poverty, including the empowerment of women
throughout their life cycle in a globalizing world**

Written statement submitted by

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[English]

Introduction

The expert group meeting on the theme of the "Empowerment of women throughout the life cycle as a transformative strategy for poverty eradication" was held in New Delhi between 26-29 November 2001. It was hosted by the Government of India and organised by the Division for the Advancement of Women. This paper draws on the deliberations and conclusions of this meeting.¹

By prioritising the goal of reducing poverty among women and girls within the current moment, the participants focused on issues of economic globalisation, including trade and financial liberalisation, social policy, global governance, and women's empowerment. The main emphasis of the discussions was on issues, policies and actions related to reducing poverty as experienced by women and girls, as well as the facilitation of their empowerment.

Poverty

Building on the conclusions of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing,² the

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geographically uneven.⁵ Globalisation partially results in an increase in the scope of the market, the harmonization of legal and judicial norms and political and economic systems, and an intensification or deepening of the levels of interaction, interconnectedness and interdependence, albeit uneven, between and within states. In addition, it is often invoked to define a set of processes, such as trade liberalisation, that give it its spatial effects and specificities.⁶

The scope and intensity of globalisation are highly differentiated in their consequences. For example, the processes of international integration and growth for some countries and regions are happening hand-in-hand with the marginalization of others. In addition, inequality, both within and between countries, has been on the increase. According to World Bank⁷ statistics,

One sixth of the world's population produce 78 per cent of the world's goods and services and get 78 per cent of the world's income; an average of \$70 per day. Three-fifths of the world's people in the poorest 61 countries receive 6 per cent of the world's income; less than \$2 a day. However, this poverty goes beyond income. While 7 of every 1,000 children die before age five in high-income countries, more than 90 die in low-income countries.

The 1999 **Human Development Report** also documented an increase in inequality between countries. The number of individuals in Eastern Europe and Central Asia living on less than US\$1 a day has risen in the last ten years to 13 million people. In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa the increase is 35 million and 39 million respectively. Unfortunately, we have no clear figures of the gendered dimensions of these sobering facts.

Despite these stark realities, there has been a growing “official” consensus⁸ that the best way to achieve development and reduce poverty is to enhance the role of the market. This has most recently been articulated in the calls for ‘Trade, not Aid’. Thus, a broad range of policies, including poverty reduction policies, are now debated almost entirely in terms of the ways in which they do, or do not, enhance the ‘free market’.⁹ Within this context, economic liberalisation and privatisation have been the preferred policy instruments of the proponents of globalisation at both the international and national levels.

Economic Liberalisation

⁵ Generally speaking, there are multiple processes of globalisation, that interact in contingent and particular ways, have complex and contradictory effects, and are in part politically constituted and contested.

⁶ Gill, Stephen. Forthcoming. “Towards a stark utopia? New Constitutionalism and the politics of globalisation”, in Lourdes Beneria and Savitri Bisnath eds. **Global Tensions: Opportunities and Challenges in the World Economy**. New York: Routledge. Kabeer, Naila and John Humphrey. 1991. “Neo-liberalism, Gender and the Limits of the Market”, in Christopher Colclough and James Manor eds. **States or Market? Neoliberalism and the Development Policy Debate**. Clarendon Press.

⁷ World Bank. 2000. **World Development Indicators 2000**. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁸ This notion of a ‘consensus’ has, to varying degrees, foreclosed, silenced and marginalized alternative discourses and approaches to neo-liberalism.

⁹ This is apparent in the Monterrey Consensus document <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd>.

The erosion of barriers to trade has been promoted with the assumptions that 'free trade' will lead to increased productivity, growth and competition, and reduced poverty levels. However during the last decade, many countries have opened their markets to international competition at a pace that is faster than that experienced in increased growth and reductions i

labour market hierarchies.¹² These workers have tended to be women, however and more recently, job and labour market insecurities are also experienced by male workers.¹³

Given that social benefits are typically linked to participation in full-time employment, the insecure labour market also makes it more difficult for women to establish rights and entitlements which are often critical to their well-being at the end of their lives. Furthermore, the extent to which increased trade has led to employment expansion in developing countries appears to be geographically uneven and largely confined to a small group of countries.

The effects of trade liberalization on women in developing countries, specifically in terms of employment and food and livelihood security, will become increasingly apparent as the multilateral trading agreements are implemented and their impacts are documented and analyzed. Possible costs, due to the agreements on agriculture, services and intellectual property rights, can include those related to the possibility of higher prices for food, health care and education. For some countries, the surge in imports resulting from the elimination of tariffs can result in the displacement of local consumer industries that produce goods such as textiles, clothing and agricultural products, most of which tend to employ women.

It was agreed that the promotion of 'free trade' and open capital markets more specifically, have been accompanied by a narrowing of choices in macroeconomic policymaking at the national level. Policies that promote fiscal restraint are often encouraged without sufficient attention to national particularities. This agenda has placed a number of policy and financial constraints on Governments, who are also confronted with increasing poverty and social polarisation within their countries. For example, during the South-east Asian financial crises, subsidies on fuel and food were cut in order to tighten the budget, an unintended outcome of this policy was an increase in the prices of basic necessities. This increase, coupled with the fact that the setting of high interest rates tended to benefit middle- and high-income groups, worsened the income disparity and social polarisation in the region.¹⁴

Privatisation

Public funding and the delivery of social services has been a cornerstone for gender equality and poverty eradication in advanced welfare States. However, the adoption of austerity measures as a component of economic restructuring, and the integration of countries into the global economy, have resulted in the downsizing of public services and the re-allocation of social services to commercial interests, nongovernmental organisations, and families.

¹² Beneria, Lourdes. 2001. "Shifting the Risk: New Employment Patterns, Informalization, and Women's Work", in International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society, 15(1): 27-53.

¹³ Standing, Guy. 1999. "Global Feminism through Flexible Labour: a Theme Revisited", in World Development, 27(3): 583-602. Standing, Guy. 1989. "Global Feminism through Hexible Labour", in World Development, 17(7).

¹⁴ Azis, Iwan J. forthcoming. "Financial Crises and Policy Making: the IMF and Alternative Perspectives", in Lourdes Beneria and Savitri Bisnath eds. **Global Tensions: Opportunities and Challenges in the World Economy**. New York: Routledge.

The public funding and delivery of a wide range of goods and education, health and welfare services including day care, care for the aged, care for the retired and disabled, is vital to women who, under existing social arrangements, are ultimately the ones to balance their time and energies between income-earning activities and the care of human beings. Thus the current trend towards privatisation of health care and education is disturbing.

economic ends, may more successfully serve to improve the well-being of women and girls living in conditions of poverty, as well as result in increases in economic growth.

Recommendations

Building on the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly the expert group meeting directed its recommendations to Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and various actors of civil society.

The participants underlined that a successful agenda for eradicating poverty and its gendered effects requires the dismantling of values, structures, and processes that maintain women's subordination and justify inequality in access to political, social and economic resources. It was also noted that the incidence of both poverty and vulnerability among women over their life cycle is also influ

On Poverty Reduction and Empowerment Linkages

- Support the development of methods and indicators to measure progress in terms of the empowerment of women, and to determine the correlation between women's empowerment and poverty eradication.

On Economic Liberalisation

- Identify and address the gendered dimensions of existing and new trade agreements to facilitate the eradication of poverty while promoting both economic growth and social development goals. Conduct sectoral analyses within the context of economic liberalisation, including in goods, services, intellectual property rights, the environment, competition, and investments in order to identify the effects on the livelihoods and prospects of women and girls living in poverty.
- Encourage, through appropriate economic and social policies, the balanced distribution of the gains from trade liberalisation including through taxes, employment, and re-training programmes.
- Ensure that the design and implementation of taxation policies do not disproportionately affect women.
- Regulate short-term capital flows to protect the livelihood strategies of poor women.

On Privatisation

- Ensure that any planned privatisation of social services and social protection do not have negative or disproportionate impacts on women, or the achievement of gender equality goals. Progressively extend social protection systems to cover economic sectors dominated by women, such as the informal economy and casual and flexible forms of work.
- Strengthen the role of the national and local government as actors in the production and delivery of adequate and affordable social services for women and girls, especially in such