

Getting development right for women

Rodrigo Jones, Panos Pictures

Street scene, Kunming, Yunnan, China

GETTING DEVELOPMENT RIGHT FOR WOMEN

Women are gaining formal rights, but this has not been matched by an improvement in their quality of life. Although women's groups have become increasingly visible and vocal, their political influence remains limited. And as governments shift more social responsibilities to families and communities, most of the burden falls on women's shoulders.

The democratic openings of the past decade have offered greater opportunities for women. Women's groups have helped draft national constitutions and have developed new legislation in areas such as family law and violence against women. Women's groups have also been among the most influential NGOs. In the 1990s, feminist ideas and practices proliferated across a wide range of public arenas—in black and indigenous movements, for example, and in trade unions, universities, political parties, and international development agencies. Women also played a prominent part in the international conferences of the 1990s.

1995 was particularly significant in this respect. It was the year of the Social Summit, which established that “equality and equity between women and men is a priority for the international community”. It was also the year of the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing.

But have formal declarations on gender equity actually had a political and social impact? Have women's lives started to change? Here the story is much less optimistic. Many of the hidden barriers and ceilings to women's meaningful participation remain stubbornly in place. Whether in UN meeting halls or in national or local governance, social conservatism continues to block the implementation of many hard-won rights. And the social dislo-

cation that has accompanied economic liberalization has often thrown extra burdens on women's shoulders.

Women in democratization

The transitions to democracy around the world owe a great deal to pressure from women's movements. Indeed, in some respects women achieved greater prominence during periods of protest against autocratic governments than they have during subsequent democratic regimes.

Women's groups take many different forms, but they can be divided into roughly three general types:

- **Human rights groups**—Some of the best-known of these emerged in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, notably the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. These and similar “non-political” protest movements relied to some extent on the hope that the military was less likely to persecute women than men because of women's seemingly apolitical nature. Women also derived some of their power from the fact that they were turning against their oppressors the very symbols—motherhood and family—that the state was claiming to uphold.

- **Popular women's groups**—These groups arose as forms of mutual support during periods of great economic hardship. Thus many women organized communal kitchens in the poorest areas of large cities. Often these groups had links with religious organizations. In Latin America, they usually emerged from Catholic community organizations; and in the Arab states and elsewhere, Islam has inspired popular women's groups. Activism by itself does not necessarily lead to a more gender-egalitarian order: in Iran, religious fervour impelled the society out of autocracy but only into theocracy (box 7.1). Even so, in the urban areas of countries such as Turkey, Islamist women have managed to provide a space in which women of

Box 7.1 – “Years of hardship, years of growth”: Feminism in an Islamic Republic

In the first months and years following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, secular professional women became easy targets of “revolutionary purification and cleansing campaigns”. Barely two weeks after the overthrow of the old regime, the Family Protection Act was scrapped as un-Islamic. Eventually, the veil was imposed and an elaborate “code of modesty” was put in place. Women were dismissed from the judiciary and subsequently barred from many positions and disciplines of higher education. Acts of defiance and resistance by women were instantly branded as counter-revolutionary, a label that not only made participants in these protests easy targets of repression, but also foreclosed the possibility of building alliances between secular professional women and Islamic women activists of the Revolution.

With the defeat of secularists, Islamic women activists (inside and outside the Parliament) found themselves acting as critics of the new government on women’s issues. It was thanks to their efforts that universities were once again opened to women, and that a new set of laws virtually reinstated the Family Protection Act. Out of these early years of Islamic women’s activism also emerged a radical re-thinking of gender in Islam—evident in a variety of women’s journals published in Iran.

One of these journals, *Zanan* (Women), undertakes a direct re-interpretation of Islamic texts from a woman’s perspective, founded on the principles of women’s choice and autonomy—a move that has provoked the anger of more traditional Islamic advocates. *Zanan* also declares affiliation and solidarity with a variety of feminisms—both Western secular and Iranian secular—and it freely cites from them. This breaks down suspicion and hostility between the religious/traditionalist and secular/modernist tendencies, which was dominant in twentieth-century Iran.

More than two decades after the Revolution, women’s issues remain central to Iran’s political agenda. Indicative of the primary place “the woman question” occupies, and the broad constituency it attracts, is women’s visibility in politics—both as voters and candidates. Iranian women played a big role in the 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami, the reformist president. They were also an active and visible force in the February 2000 parliamentary elections. In Tehran, six out of 30 parliamentary seats were won by women—significantly, without any quotas or “reserved seats”.

Even with a predominantly reformist Parliament, women face an enormous task in asserting their rights. The extent to which gender equality can be incorporated into reforms of the legal system and the judiciary will reflect the constraints facing President Khatami, as he tries to promote human rights and the rule of law in a system where conservatives have the final say.

diverse backgrounds seek empowerment, even if their rhetoric and ideology does not always endorse gender equality.

- **Feminist groups**—These tend to consist of middle-class and professional women. During military rule in Latin America, feminist groups often emerged from militant left-wing organizations and student groups that had been driven underground. Indeed, it was often women's subordination within such groups that planted the seeds of feminist consciousness. Other women gained new ideas from periods of exile in Europe or the United States.

One of the most crucial questions for women activists is how far they should co-operate with each other and take part in broader political processes. How closely should feminist groups ally themselves with popular women's movements? Many would argue that this is a strategic imperative. A major challenge for feminists in Morocco and Turkey, for example, is to free themselves from the tutelage of political parties without becoming isolated; this means they must extend their social base to a more diverse constituency. But as yet there are too few signs of such cross-class alliances.

In Latin America during the period of dictatorship, feminist groups often focused their attention on the material conditions of women's lives and supported the survival struggles of poor and working-class women. Many feminists feel that these ties with popular movements have now been weakened.

Indeed, one of the major concerns of feminist activists in the 1990s was the increasing "NGO-ization" of the women's movement. Women's groups have been shifting away from feminist-inspired activities such as mobilization, popular education and consciousness-raising. They have taken on more technical and advisory functions, such as the delivery of social services, advising government agencies on how to design gender-sensitive programmes,

or training their staff in "gender planning".

Some argue that as feminist groups and NGOs have become more professionalized and specialized, they have severed their links with grassroots and community-based organizations. They could respond that when implementing state- or donor-funded projects for female-headed households, or evaluating the gender impacts of projects, they still come into contact with poor and working-class women's organizations. But the nature of NGO-grassroots linkages seems to have changed. Moreover, the NGOs that are selected as partners and thus receive funding are not necessarily those with the strongest links to the grassroots. To maintain their legitimacy and their claim to be representative, NGOs and their leaders require organic ties to this base. But such ties cannot be taken for granted; they must be consciously nurtured.

Women's groups may also be wary about taking part in mainstream politics. Many deliberately keep their distance from broader political processes and are ambivalent about becoming embroiled in party politics. In Uganda, for example, women's self-help groups and voluntary associations struggling for economic and social rights deliberately distance themselves from public authorities, even at the local level. They also avoid formal political activity, which they regard as sectarian, corrupt and divisive.

This is comparable in some respects to the situation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Many women in communist countries identified feminism with state socialism and government policies of "emancipation from above", which often pressured women to work outside the home. As a reaction, many women now question the core feminist tenet that women who stay in the private sphere are being oppressed, and that they need liberating into work and public life. This radical rejection of Western feminism is thus partly a repudiation of communism. But it is clear that femi-

nism emerging in this part of the world is more compatible with the family, motherhood and femininity. In Hungary, for example, women are very visible in public life—but are to be found outside formal party politics. Many women are working in NGOs or committees of local government. The few avowedly feminist initiatives tend to be linked with specific services, such as hostels for battered women.

WORKING WITHIN AND AGAINST THE STATE

States may have been weakened in recent years, but they still hold crucial influence over women's lives. In the industrialized countries, feminists have tended to adopt different positions vis-à-vis the state. At one extreme is the view that the state is immutably masculine—the ultimate vehicle of social control over women's lives. This perception is common among feminists in the United States, for example, and in the United Kingdom. The alternative view is that the state is an important vehicle for social justice—a view more likely to be heard in Canada and New Zealand, which have a strong tradition of social liberalism, and in Australia where “femocrats”—feminist bureaucrats—have used the state to the advantage of women. Scandinavian women take a similar approach: they have strong welfare states and more faith in the merits of state intervention.

The situation in developing countries provides further contrasts. Compared to their counterparts living in European welfare states, women here are less touched by the state's welfare provisioning. Their states also tend to be weaker and less able to enforce civil rights across the national territory and for all social strata. They are less likely to disseminate information about new legislation—or to enforce it—due either to political expediency or because they lack power. Women's lives are thus shaped more by the prevailing norms—

often fluid but usually conservative—of their societies. In some cases, weak systems of internal regulation result in high levels of state violence and violation of civil rights. A number of women's organizations in India, for example, are rooted in their opposition to police brutality.

Nevertheless, the transition to democracy does allow some women to have a greater influence in state bureaucracies. This has been most evident in Latin America. In virtually all Latin American countries, some specialized “women's machineries” have been set up in the public administration. The reasons for this have been varied. In some cases, it has been in response to pressure exerted by foreign donors, or to funding made available for this purpose. In other cases the dominant political party may see it as a useful political resource—as a means either of demonstrating progressive national attitudes to the international community (as in Bangladesh) or as a source of political support from a hitherto neglected constituency (as in Uganda). In yet other cases, such as in Brazil, Chile, and South Africa, it has been through the persistent advocacy of certain streams within the women's movement that state machineries for women have been set up.

Strategically positioned within the state, femocrats are, in theory, well situated to identify and take advantage of political opportunities to push forward items on the women's agenda. But their position—at once within and against the state—raises questions of legitimacy in the eyes of both their colleagues in the bureaucracy and the women's movement on the outside.

In Brazil, the early years of democracy saw the emergence of Councils on the Feminine Condition, first in São Paulo and later in other states, as well as at the national level. These councils, often staffed by feminists, successfully promoted women's health and reproductive rights—and also helped introduce women's police stations specialized in cases of violence

against women. In the late 1980s, the National Council helped incorporate women's demands into the new constitution. The links between these councils and the women's movement are weaker now than they used to be, but women's influence over state policy, particularly on health, is probably stronger in Brazil than in most other developing countries.

In Chile, the women's movement exerted pressure on the centre-left coalition that won the 1989 election, leading to the creation of the National Service for Women (SERNAM) within the Ministry of Planning. But SERNAM's role was unclear from the outset and it drew strong opposition from right-wing parties. It seems to have concentrated on awareness raising and implementing various pilot projects. Recently it has taken the lead in developing new legislation in family law and on violence against women, and in modifying the labour code—though it steers clear of controversial issues such as abortion.

Chile's experience also reflects broader dilemmas. While SERNAM derived its original dynamism and legitimacy from a strong women's movement, its relations with the women's movement have been ambivalent because it is seen as an arm of the government. There has been some disappointment with SERNAM's conservative approach to gender issues. Popular women's groups, in particular, feel alienated from SERNAM: many poor and working-class women fail to identify with the campaigns it runs.

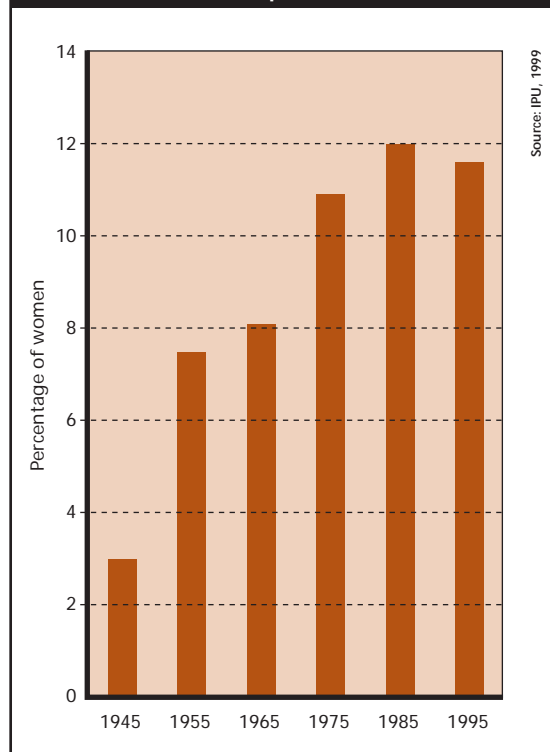
Most other countries also have some specialized machinery for women. However, in many cases the relationship between women's units in public administration and women's constituencies in civil society has proved difficult to establish or exploit. Women's groups and NGOs are often reluctant to associate themselves too closely with these units. This reflects a healthy concern about retaining autonomy, but it makes strategic collaboration

difficult. In Morocco, for example, the women's movement has tended to bypass the women's units in public administration and has worked primarily on the outside or through alliances with political parties.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Women's representation in political parties and in national legislatures is weak. As figure 7.1 indicates, the proportion of women members of the lower houses of parliament has increased only marginally over the past two to three decades, and at 12 per cent remains far below that of men. Table 7.1 shows that representation in lower houses is highest in Europe, though high proportions in the Nordic countries boost Europe's overall figure. As table 7.2 indicates, these countries have the strongest women's representation in the world. The United States comes well down the list, with a proportion of only 13 per cent.

Figure 7.1 – The proportion of women in lower houses of parliament worldwide



**Table 7.1 – Women's representation—
regional averages**

	Single House or Lower House %	Upper House or Senate %	Both Houses combined %
Europe	16	10	14
Asia	15	12	15
Americas	15	15	15
Sub-Saharan Africa	11	13	11
Pacific	9	21	11
Arab states	4	3	4
World average	13	11	13

Note: Europe refers to OSCE member countries.
Source: IPU, 1999

The poor representation of women in national legislatures is astonishing. Since all versions of liberal democracy link the right to vote with the right to stand for office, the fact that the gender composition of national assemblies is so at odds with the gender composition of the population signifies that something is wrong. Echoing this sentiment, the Platform for Action agreed upon at the Fourth World Conference on Women identifies women's representation in decision-making bodies as one of its key areas of concern.

Women's invisibility in the world of institutional politics is partly a historical legacy, but it also reflects the "boys' club" prejudices of parties and electorates. Deeply entrenched barriers exclude women from meaningful participation in political parties, where they are habitually relegated to women's wings and per-

Table 7.2 – Women in lower houses of parliament in selected countries

Rank	Country	Election year	Number of women	% women
1	Sweden	1998	149	43
2	Denmark	1998	67	37
3	Finland	1999	74	37
4	Norway	1997	60	36
5	Netherlands	1998	54	36
6	Iceland	1999	22	35
7	Germany	1998	207	31
8	South Africa	1999	120	30
9	New Zealand	1996	35	29
10	Argentina	1997	71	28
24	Costa Rica	1998	11	19
26	United Kingdom	1997	121	18
28	Uganda	1996	50	18
41	United States	1998	58	13

Source: IPU, 1999

form cheer-leading roles. At the same time, the cultural construction of political office as masculine makes it extremely difficult for women to be elected without some form of electoral engineering, such as through quota systems or reserved seats. Women candidates tend to attract fewer votes than men even when they do not campaign on women's issues. And when they do stand on a feminist platform, they have even less success—often being seen as anti-men, anti-tradition or anti-family.

There have been some attempts to redress the balance. Progressive political parties determined to improve women's representation have made efforts to favour women. A number of parties in Latin America have boosted the number of women candidates by operating informal quotas. In Argentina, they include the two largest parties, the Radical Civic Union, and the Party of Justice; in Bolivia, Nation's Conscience; and in Mexico, the Revolutionary Democratic Party.

In Europe a number of centrist and left-wing parties have pursued similar policies. In Scandinavia they did so in response to pressure from women's groups. The Swedish Social Democratic Party has taken one of the most advanced positions: since 1994 it has insisted that if the first person on the list of electoral candidates is a man, the next must be a woman—and that they should alternate thereafter.

Other countries attempting positive discrimination have run into problems. In the United Kingdom for a brief period, for example, some local branches of the Labour Party were required to produce women-only short lists. This was subsequently abandoned, since it conflicted with equal opportunities legislation. But it nevertheless resulted after the 1997 election in a striking increase in the number of women Labour MPs—101, almost one-quarter of the total.

A common way for parties to boost the number of women MPs is through the party

list. If elections are based on proportional representation using party lists, then parties are free to choose candidates for their lists as they see fit—and women candidates will appear on the list if gender equality is a priority for the party. To some extent this de-personalizes the vote and reduces the opportunity for electorates to discriminate against individuals on the basis of ethnic identity or gender. In South Africa the ANC has taken advantage of this to boost the number of women in the National Assembly; as table 7.2 indicates, South Africa now ranks eighth in the world, with women comprising 30 per cent of parliamentarians.

Positive discrimination may also be enshrined in legislation or in the constitution—typically by reserving a specific number of seats for women. In Uganda, for example, one parliamentary seat from each of the 39 districts is reserved for woman. In Argentina, 30 per cent of candidates for elective posts must be women. In Bangladesh, 30 seats out of 330 are reserved for women; in Eritrea, 10 out of 105; and in Tanzania, 15 seats out of 255. The same principles have also been used in the *panchayats*, or village councils, in India (box 7.2). One unfavourable outcome of reserved seats is that it risks creating an enclave for women's political participation, with the electorate assuming that the reserved seats are the only legitimate seats for women.

THE IMPACT OF WOMEN ON GOVERNMENT

Unfortunately there is no guarantee that women elected to parliament will stand up for women's interests. Many of the most successful women politicians have not been feminists. And those who have been elected to office through quotas or reserved seats may be reluctant to voice dissent, being at the mercy of the central or provincial party that compiles electoral lists.

In Uganda, many women MPs were per-

sualed to enter politics by male elders, and some regard their position as a favour granted by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) rather than as a right; they are therefore reluctant to voice criticism of the NRM government. In political systems where a single party is dominant and women politicians have no other realistic political option, their leverage on the party is drastically reduced, and they are less able to explore issues that may not be on the party's agenda. Nevertheless, women parliamentarians in Uganda have on several occasions come together to create a united front and to push for progressive legislation, as happened in 1997–98 over the Land Law.

Similarly in India, while the local political elite may have hoped that “suitable” women,

or proxy representatives, would be elected to the *panchayats*, the outcome has been more complex. Women's participation in structures of power and decision making has itself provided opportunities for rapid growth and learning. Many women have been outstanding chairpersons and members of the *panchayats*, demonstrating initiative and leadership—and countering the idea that they are mere namesake or proxy representatives. Indeed, the term “proxy” symbolizes a complete denial of the possibility of women's agency, growth and learning.

Women MPs are more likely to represent women's interests if they maintain strong links with women's organizations. Instead of operating on their own in a political vacuum, they need working relationships with other women

Box 7.2 – Women in local government in India

In April 1993, India's Constitution was amended (the 73rd Amendment), to provide special incentives for women to be elected to local government. This amendment directed all state legislatures to amend their respective *panchayat* legislation to conform to the constitutional amendment, within one year. Henceforth one third of representatives in the village councils, the *panchayats*, as well as in the corresponding municipal bodies, would be women. This met with stiff resistance and procrastination in many states. And men sometimes tried to subvert the process by nominating their daughters or daughters-in-law to serve as proxies.

Nevertheless, the benefits are starting to be felt. Around one million women have been elected to *panchayats* and have been focusing on important local government issues, such as the Public Food Distribution System and minimum wages. And they have been pressing for improvements in health, education and water systems. Just as important, they have highlighted major social issues such as domestic violence and alcoholism.

Rajasthan has some of India's greatest gender inequities—with female infanticide, high female illiteracy, and a low ratio of women to men. So there was considerable resistance to the election of women and scepticism about their abilities. Men still heavily criticize the women members' performance—and some women *panchayat* chairs will clearly be more effective than others, depending on their experience and ability. But when questioned more closely, many people in Rajasthan, especially women, point out that the women members have actually worked harder on important matters, such as repairing water pumps, and are generally far more approachable and willing to listen. Still, real progress can only be claimed when more women contest the general seats and not just the “ladies' seats”.

“on the outside”. It is particularly important to maintain these links during transitions toward democracy. When the political centre of gravity shifts from informal political movements to conventional political parties, there is always a danger that women will again be marginalized.

Women’s more obvious successes in government have been at the formal level—ensuring that new constitutions are grounded in gender equality. Women have also helped introduce progressive legislation in such areas as divorce, domestic violence and reproductive rights. But enforcing this legislation has often proved more difficult, not just because of social resistance, but also because of state weakness in administering justice and a political and economic environment that is hostile to social expenditure. Many women’s reproductive rights services, for example, have been undermined by a general weakening of primary health care. Thus in Zimbabwe the introduction of user fees for prenatal care has dissuaded many women from attending clinics and resulted in a dramatic rise in maternal mortality.

This also reflects a more basic problem. One policy area that has consistently eluded scrutiny is decision making on public expenditure. Some have argued that part of the problem lies in women’s lack of fluency and skill in economic analysis. If this is the case, then the Women’s Budget Statements and Initiatives first introduced in Australia and Canada, and more recently in South Africa, which require all government departments to account for the impacts of their activities on women, can provide a useful tool for strengthening the technical capacities of women’s machineries.

But the problems are more deep-seated. To some extent they reflect a more general shift in the balance of power away from social sector ministries and MPs and toward technocrats in the ministries of finance and trade. Parliamentarians of both sexes have been disempowered. Women bureaucrats well equipped

with economic analytical skills may be able to contribute to what goes on inside these insulated technocracies, in ministries of finance for example. But this is no substitute for a more open public debate that enables the parliament, women’s groups and networks, along with other social groups, to scrutinize economic policies and decisions that affect the well-being of their constituents. To see women’s exclusion from economic policy making simply in terms of the skills that they lack (and need to be equipped with) misses the larger question of whether the emerging political arrangements enable the public as a whole to review and control the actions and decisions taken by the executive.

WOMEN’S NGOS

As indicated in chapter 3, governments have been shifting many social responsibilities from state agencies to civil society. This has important implications for women. Governments have been passing much of the burden not to organizations but to individual women—requiring that they fill the vacuum of diminished social services by spending more time caring for sick and disabled relatives and neighbours. In this way, governments are “privatizing” health care by recruiting unpaid family labour.

Donors have encouraged the NGO-ization of women’s health services. Some organizations, such as the World Bank, may see this as a way of avoiding the perceived corruption and inefficiencies of existing state services. In Tajikistan, for example, the British NGO Christian Aid and the EU are funding the Khatlon Women’s Health Project, which offers poor communities services that the government has neither the means nor the will to provide.

Does the willingness of women’s NGOs to shoulder these burdens encourage governments to slough off their responsibilities? Even when governments claim to be improving service

provision by entering into partnerships with women's NGOs, the outcomes of such partnerships can be ambiguous. As chapter 6 argued, in many instances "partnership" means giving the NGOs too many tasks with too few resources.

NGOs also run a number of risks by entering into such partnerships. In addition to being overburdened, they may find themselves less able to criticize the government. In Peru, for example, the Manuela Ramos Movement ("Manuela") administers the USAID-funded Reproductive Health in the Community Project (ReproSalud). This aims to bring innovative services to poor women, while also encouraging them to make more effective claims on government services. But these official links proved a disadvantage when the government health services were accused of coercive sterilization. Manuela had to choose between quiet diplomacy and openly criticizing public services in ways that might play into the hands of right-wing forces that wanted to shut down all public reproductive health care. In the event, after diplomacy failed Manuela came out publicly against sterilization abuses.

Women's NGOs have to make choices appropriate to their own circumstances. In many cases this must mean taking a deliberately dissident stance. In Egypt one of the most controversial issues addressed by women's groups is female genital mutilation (FGM). Egypt's FGM Task Force maintains a vigilant role of critique and advocacy. It refuses close collaboration with a government that frequently attacks NGOs, especially those involved in the promotion of human rights.

Finally, given the dependence of NGOs on external sources of funding, the priorities of funders can encourage the proliferation of specific types of NGOs and activities. In the case of Chile, for example, in order to remain economically viable many women's NGOs are letting go of projects that were closely associated with their feminist commitments—such as

popular education projects on sexuality and parenting, and leadership training. Instead, they are taking up projects that are more attractive to funders—such as women's health, micro-enterprise development, and job training programmes for women heads of household.

Some NGOs manage to adapt to new funding criteria that encourage more technical-professional endeavours, while others lose out. Sadly, some of the losers are organizations that have strong links with poor and working-class women, and with community-based organizations.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the distinction between women's NGOs and the women's movement is not clear-cut. First, the vast majority of professional NGO activists also view themselves as part of a larger women's movement. Second, women's NGOs vary tremendously in their power, resources, ideology, relations to donors and governments—and above all in the extent and quality of their connections with grassroots movements. In recent years, the crucial ties between NGOs and their grassroots constituents have begun to change, and in some contexts, they have been weakened.

To some extent this is because donors, when choosing which NGOs to fund, rarely give priority to the extent of their links to grassroots organizations and to the people they are presumed to represent and service. If donors established funding criteria that enhanced NGO linkages to these constituents, this would go some way toward reversing this trend.

Fulfilling women's rights

As a result of the social damage caused by structural adjustment, many people have begun to focus more on poverty—and specifically on women's poverty. One of the key areas of concern of the Beijing Platform of Action is poverty and women's disproportionate share of it.

This attention to women's poverty is welcome. But it has also been limited. Many organizations

have targeted particular groups—notably female-headed households, which both fails to grasp the diversity within this group, and sidesteps the more difficult and politically sensitive area of intra-household poverty. They have also cordoned women off as a vulnerable group that needs to be protected by weak and frequently non-existent safety nets. More positively, given the growing phenomenon of the working poor, among whom women are present in large numbers, some organizations have tried to organize women workers and provide a space for them to articulate their demands more forcefully.

A more fundamental issue, however, is why women are poor in the first place. More light needs to be shed on the gender aspects of impoverishment—the social and economic relations and institutions that continue to send women and men into poverty along different trajectories. If one generalization can be made, it is that women's lack of power constitutes not only an important dimension of women's disadvantage in itself, but also shapes the kinds of claims and entitlements to resources that women can mobilize.

Reducing women's poverty will therefore mean fulfilling their rights—rather than simply meeting their needs. This is an important distinction. The rights approach reformulates needs as ethical and legal norms—implying a duty on the part of those in power to provide all the means necessary to ensure that needs are met. This may not appear to take matters forward: many developing country governments argue that they lack the necessary resources, so repackaging needs as rights does little more than restate those needs more vehemently.

The advantage of asserting the issues not merely in terms of needs, but of rights, is that the bearers of rights can make official claims as citizens. Women as individuals and groups become part of the decision-making process. They are also in a stronger position to defend themselves against other powerful influences—

including religious and fundamentalist groups. And they can stand against those whose macroeconomic or neo-Malthusian agendas serve to perpetuate racial, ethnic, class and gender inequities.

The sections that follow examine women's rights in three crucial areas: reproductive health, education and work.

Reproductive health rights

One of the most notable developments of the 1990s was that reproductive health rights came to be viewed more comprehensively. When women's health movements in the West first introduced the concept, they were primarily concerned with women's right to control their fertility. Women's groups in the South embraced these principles but took them further, incorporating them into a much broader vision that encompassed all of women's health needs and linked them to development.

Women's groups have rightly argued that women's reproductive health should be set in a broader context. If women cannot control their fertility and be free from sexual abuse and violence, they cannot function fully as responsible, participating members of families and communities: they cannot truly exercise citizenship. At the same time, reproductive health and well-being demand such basic conditions as clean water and decent housing. Without these, women find themselves in untenable dilemmas. Thus women who are HIV-positive must choose between breastfeeding their infants and exposing them to risk of AIDS—or bottle-feeding them and exposing them to deadly bacterial infection from contaminated drinking water (box 7.3).

Women's groups in developing countries concerned with reproductive health do not, of course, form a homogeneous bloc. They have emerged in different circumstances and have different priorities. In South Asia, for example, they have been concerned primarily with such

issues as sterilization and coercion, and the promotion of long-acting hormonal contraceptives—and have always had to struggle against a donor-driven preoccupation with overpopulation. Women's groups in Latin America, on the other hand, emerged as part of broader movements for democratization, in a political climate emphasizing concepts of citizenship and rights. They have put more emphasis on women's autonomy and their rights to higher quality health services. In Africa, women's health activists have been preoccupied with

issues of basic survival—in the face of high maternal and infant mortality rates and the growing menace of HIV/AIDS—as well as with controversial rights issues such as female genital mutilation.

But women's organizations all over the South have insisted that reproductive rights must be set in a broader context. They argue that there is little prospect of fulfilling women's individual rights in a generally hostile economic and social climate. A number of international networks have argued this case forcefully.

Box 7.3 – The story of Futhi

The following is an imaginary profile based on fact.

Futhi is one of the 18.5 million women worldwide, and one of the nearly 11 per cent of pregnant women using urban prenatal clinics in South Africa, who are infected by HIV. The roots of Futhi's infection start with marriage—a husband who works in the mines, is away a good deal, and has unprotected sex with prostitutes. But there has never been a question of leaving him, since she is unable to earn enough on her own to support her two children.

Thanks to South Africa's progressive reproductive health policy, Futhi has access to a caring reproductive health clinic nearby. She learned about condoms from the clinic nurse, but she was afraid to suggest them to her husband for fear he would call her promiscuous and beat her. Besides, Zulu culture tells women to accommodate their husbands' desires.

Then Futhi discovered she was pregnant and HIV-positive—and faced the dilemma of what to do. In South Africa, abortion is a woman's right for any reason during the first trimester. Nurses at the prenatal clinic have warned her she cannot breastfeed the new baby without great risk of infecting it with HIV, and there is not yet safe drinking water in her township to use for bottle feeding. She has heard there are drugs that can prevent HIV transmission to the foetus, but these drugs—made by US-based pharmaceutical companies—are too expensive for the economically pressed South African government to buy on the world market.

Faced with threats of punitive sanctions under existing patent laws, the government has not authorized the local manufacture of cheaper drugs. Even if transnational drug companies lower prices in African countries, the drugs are still likely to cost too much for Futhi, and South Africa's inadequate health care system will lack the capacity to distribute them. So advanced drugs will not protect Futhi's baby or assure her a longer life to care for her children. Apparently, abortion is her only choice. Fortunately, in South Africa, at least it is a choice.

One of the most influential has been Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of women activists from all regions of the South. DAWN has long argued that reproductive rights can only be achieved in a supportive environment that allows women adequate housing, education, employment, property rights and legal equality, as well as freedom from physical abuse, harassment, and all forms of gender-based violence.

Reproductive rights thus require legal recognition and protection in the courts, freedom from repressive religious and traditional codes that constrain choice, and freedom from domestic violence and forced pregnancy. All these are civil and political rights. But at the same time, reproductive rights also require reliable and affordable maternal and child health services, and access to safe contraception and follow-up care, not to mention adequate nutrition to avoid a wide range of risks. All these are economic or social rights.

Women all over the world have an increasing sense of entitlement—that their rights should be upheld. One seven-country survey, by the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG), found that most respondents thought they were entitled to make their own decisions about marriage, fertility, contraception, childcare and work. However, if they wanted to fulfil these rights, they often had to act in secrecy, to evade the censure of family or neighbours, or the prohibitive laws of the state. Or they had to engage in a series of trade-offs—accepting sexual demands, say, in return for greater help with childcare. What would help them to resist abusive husbands, disrespectful doctors, and religious dictates in making their reproductive and sexual decisions? One of the most important factors appeared to be membership in a community group that took them out of their isolation—enabling them to act together both on

their own behalf and that of their daughters, and on behalf of future generations.

The Programme of Action (POA) that emerged from the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 in Cairo endorsed this vision, moving on from demographic targets and a narrow preoccupation with family planning to a broader understanding of reproductive rights—insisting that population and development strategies be based on women's empowerment, and on gender equality and equity (box 7.4).

Nevertheless, the Cairo Programme of Action also endorsed market-friendly policies that, in practice, hamper the achievement of women's reproductive rights (table 7.3) In its chapter on health, the POA recognizes the devastating impacts that structural adjustment programmes and the transition to market economies have had on health, especially among the poor. But in its implementation chapters, the POA reverts to the market-oriented policies that have actually widened disparities in income, mortality and morbidity. The POA urges governments to improve the cost-effectiveness, cost-recovery and quality of services by reintroducing user fees. It also asks them to “promote the role of the private sector in service delivery and in the production and distribution...of high-quality reproductive health and family planning commodities”; and to “review legal, regulatory and import policies ...that unnecessarily prevent or restrict the greater involvement of the private sector”.

More significantly, in the 1990s governments have started to implement health sector reforms designed by the World Bank and other donors, with the aim of improving the cost-effectiveness of public health systems. Efforts to address crises in the financing and delivery of health care have taken different forms, but they have a number of common elements, including the pursuit of cost-effectiveness, the introduction of user charges, decentralization,

Table 7.3 – A feminist report card on the Cairo Programme of Action

New achievements	Remaining gaps and challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift from population control to “reproductive rights and reproductive health” paradigm; comprehensive definition of reproductive health including sexual health, integrated with primary health services for all (Paras. 7.2, 8.8). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to safe, legal abortion not recognized as part of reproductive health and rights; deference to national laws; where illegal, requirement of treatment for complications only (Para. 8.25).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of “reproductive rights” as part of “already recognized international human rights”; includes “the right to attain the highest standard of reproductive and sexual health”, “the <i>means</i> to do so”, “informed choice” and freedom from “discrimination, coercion and violence” (an end to targets and incentives—Paras. 7.3, 7.12, 7.22). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliance on private market mechanisms (cost-recovery schemes, user fees, health reform to assure cost-effectiveness); increased involvement of private sector and deregulation, rather than measures for global macroeconomic restructuring, to generate resources and assure accountability (Paras. 8.8, 13.22, 15.15, 15.18).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of adolescent rights to all reproductive and sexual health services, including “sexual education” and full protection against unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other STDs (Paras. 7.2, 7.37, 7.45, 7.47). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambiguous language about “the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents” could compromise right to confidentiality; inadequate resource allocations; absence of multi-sectoral integration (e.g., health and education sectors).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Gender Equality, Equity and Empowerment of Women” as a separate chapter; recognition of “the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status” as “a highly important end in itself” (Para. 4.1). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No resource allocations or specified amounts for any aspect of sustainable development, primary health care, women’s empowerment and improved status, poverty alleviation or environment (Ch. 13).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of all forms of violence against women, including FGM, and measures to end them as integral to reproductive health (Paras. 4.4, 4.9, 4.22, 4.23, 7.3, 7.6, 7.17). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treatment of “women” as a unitary category; failure to recognize racial, ethnic and class divisions in access to resources and services, and in health risks (except HIV/AIDS).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared male responsibility for childcare, housework, and reproductive and sexual health as essential to gender equality (Ch. 4-C). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No concrete strategies for implementation, no resource allocations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouragement of governments to expand and strengthen “grassroots, community-based and activist groups for women” (Para. 4.12). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No resource allocations or specified targets.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of the “diversity of family forms,” including female-headed households, and the need for government policies to benefit all, especially the most vulnerable (Paras. 5.1, 5.2). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to expressly recognize affirmative sexual rights along with reproductive rights, including right to diversity of sexual expression and orientation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of reproductive health services as comprising not only family planning but also prenatal and obstetric care, infertility treatment, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, STDs and gynecological cancers (Paras. 7.6, 8.8). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specification of precise monetary target (\$17 billion) but <i>imbalance</i> in resource allocations: twice as much specified for “family planning component” as for all of “reproductive health component” put together (Paras.13.14–13.15).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target date of 2015 for reproductive health services, increasing life expectancy, reducing infant and child mortality and reducing maternal mortality (Paras. 7.6, 7.16, 8.5, 8.16, 8.21). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate allocation of resources to reproductive health component; no resources directed to necessary infrastructure, poverty alleviation and enabling conditions.

Source: Petchesky, 1999

and greater participation from private companies and NGOs. Many of these reforms have been disastrous for poor women. Cost recovery schemes in particular have prevented many women from attending prenatal clinics. In Zimbabwe, NGOs claim that this has led to a fivefold increase in maternal mortality rates. In Ukraine and Bulgaria, women who cannot afford to pay market prices for contraceptives are resorting to risky abortions. And while decentralization should offer better access to services, this assumes that local centres will be given the necessary resources.

Of course, no one wants health systems that are inefficient and wasteful. On the other hand, it is surely wrong to have a narrow definition of cost-effectiveness as virtually the only criterion of success, and to apply user fees as a standard prescription. The World Bank's *World Development Reports* for 1996 and 1997 reiterated the cost-effectiveness mantra. They endorsed the goal of ensuring universal access to basic health services, but argued that the best way to achieve this was through privatization. They encouraged governments to transfer less-efficient hospitals to private markets, and to transfer other services to private subcontractors whom users would pay in cash or vouchers. Whatever "universal access" means in this context, it clearly does not mean universal rights or universal coverage. Instead, it assumes that all but the poorest will be able to pay for

treatment—either from their own pockets or from private insurance.

Private providers are thus positioned to make money out of what was formerly the public social sector—and derive much of the income from public revenues. Most citizens then have to buy social services, leaving those who cannot afford to pay—the most vulnerable—to be protected by often non-existent safety nets. In other words, health care splits into a two-tier system: one part for the better-off "health consumers", for whom it becomes just another commodity; and another part for the poor, for whom it becomes either another form of public assistance, or just an unattainable luxury.

These changes have important implications for reproductive health care. In population and development strategies, the centre of gravity has moved away from crude population control and the distribution of contraceptives toward a radical restructuring of health delivery systems. Those in the driver's seat are no longer the demographers, but the health and development economists. They present women with a more complex scenario. On one hand, they seek to empower women by engaging women's NGOs as providers and monitors of services. On the other hand, they disempower women by cutting away at the state services on which they depend.

Women's NGOs can play an important role

Box 7.4 – Gender equality and gender equity

The terms equality and equity are often used interchangeably. But they are not the same. They reflect an underlying tension within feminist circles, between those who want to emphasize the importance of women having the same conditions as men, and those who prefer to emphasize—and celebrate—women's differences from men.

Gender justice demands both equality and equity. Equality means equivalence between men and women—in economic resources, legal rights, political participation and personal relations. Equity means a full recognition of women's specific needs—whether these arise from historical patterns of gender bias, biological differences or social inequality.

both as service providers and as civil society advocates who scrutinize health providers. In some cases they can function as partners of the state, providing training and advice. But they should not take over the state's responsibilities for the overall regulation and assurance of basic health care. Nor should they cede their independent critical voice. The most successful models of national-level implementation of sexual and reproductive health programmes—in Brazil and South Africa, for example—are in countries that have strong state institutions that subscribe to principles of social solidarity and justice. These countries also have strong civil society organizations that push the state forward and call it to account. In these circumstances, women's NGOs can both co-operate with and critique government policies. In

many other countries, where the political conditions are different, this combination is more difficult to achieve.

Women's education rights

Everyone accepts the importance of education, and the world made enormous progress in this area during the second half of the twentieth century. Between 1950 and 1998, the global literacy rate rose from 45 to 80 per cent. Sustaining these increases remains a challenge, as many children in school in developing countries are first-generation learners, and hence their enrolment is vulnerable to changes in national or parental circumstances. Moreover, that still leaves 880 million people illiterate—of whom two thirds are women. The worst problems are in sub-Saharan Africa and South

Table 7.4 – Primary and secondary education by region

	Primary school						Secondary school	
	Gross enrolment ratio ^a 1990–97		Net enrolment ratio ^b 1990–96		Net attendance ^c (%) 1990–98		Gross enrolment ratio ^a 1990–96	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
Sub-Saharan Africa	82	67	59	51	61	57	27	22
Middle East and North Africa	95	82	85	77	85	75	64	54
South Asia	105	81	65	50	74	62	52	33
East Asia and Pacific	117	115	99	99	93	93	67	61
Latin America and Caribbean	107	104	87	87	89	90	48	52
Developing countries	105	92	86	81	81	75	55	46
CEE^d/CIS and Baltic states	99	98	93	92	-	-	82	82
Industrialized countries	104	103	97	97	-	-	105	107
World	104	94	88	84	81	75	61	54

Notes: ^a The number of children enrolled in a level (primary or secondary), regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the same level. ^b The number of children enrolled in primary school who belong to the age group that officially corresponds to primary schooling, divided by the total population of the same age group. ^c Percentage of children in the age group that officially corresponds to primary schooling who attend primary school. ^d Central and Eastern Europe.

Source: UNICEF, 2000

Asia, where literacy rates are below 60 per cent.

These problems are likely to persist. Table 7.4, which shows the latest data for school enrolment, reveals these considerable disparities between regions—but the figures may mask some wide disparities between countries. Thus, within sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana's net primary school enrolment ratio was 81 per cent while Ethiopia's was 28 per cent. Similarly in Latin America, although the overall primary school attendance level is above 90 per cent, in Guatemala it is only 58 per cent. Within countries there are also disparities between social groups. Thus in India the participation rate of rural children lags 20 percentage points behind that of urban children. And as table 7.4 illustrates, although gender gaps have been narrowing, significant sex disparities remain—particularly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. These are two of the poorest regions of the world, and many of the difficulties that girls face in obtaining an adequate education are clearly intensified by poverty. Indeed, the closing gender gap in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa is attributed to a decline in the enrolment of boys and only a marginal increase in the participation of girls.

WHY POOR GIRLS GET LESS EDUCATION

A number of reasons have been put forward to explain why girls confront difficulties in receiving adequate education in the poorest countries. Some are based on pressures within the household. Others have more to do with the kind of education on offer—which may be more accessible or useful to boys than girls.

The most crucial decisions about education take place within households—and are the result of complex bargaining between men, women and children. Negotiations will necessarily involve a mixture of cultural, economic and social factors—all of which overlap and are difficult to separate. Despite their importance, relatively little is known about these decisions:

while researchers are free to enter schools, they have much less access to the intra-household arena. However, it is possible to identify some of the factors involved.

Many are linked to social attitudes and culture. In some societies, parents—judging what they see to be the best interest of their daughter—may deliberately cut short her education if they think it will undermine her future marriage prospects. A prospective husband may not want an educated wife, whom he would find less easy to control. Thus parents may see it as more advantageous for a girl to stay at home and prepare for the responsibilities of motherhood.

But more often families do not deliberately reject education; they make an implicit or explicit trade-off. Although parents might want their daughter to go to school, they have to weigh the benefits against the immediate financial costs. The costs may be those of transport, say, or clothes or books. Or they may be the opportunity cost of losing their child's labour at home. While these judgements affect both boys and girls, it is the girl who often loses out. Even at an early age, a daughter may be more valuable at home: she can perform more useful tasks than her brothers within the household, such as cooking or cleaning or caring for even younger siblings.

In urban areas, where the pressures are different, it is the boys—who are easier to employ in the informal sector—who may be kept from school. In a number of Latin American countries, this means that boys' enrolment in secondary education is lower than girls'. But there is also an interaction between work and school. In Latin American cities for example, many children work as a way of paying for school.

The economic trade-off may also be a more strategic one—judging which child will offer better long-term returns. Even when primary education is free, there are generally additional costs for books or clothing that represent sig-

nificant expenditures for poor families. Again the girl may lose out, because even if education does not diminish her chances of finding a husband, it might be considered wasteful if she will soon be leaving the family home. In this case, it might be better to have an educated son who can provide for parents in their old age. Yet this may not necessarily mean educating the boy: parents may well decide that their daughter is more likely than their son to maintain closer links with them after she leaves home.

In addition to economic considerations, parents may also worry about their daughter's security—particularly after puberty. The distance between home and school may be cause for concern. And parents may also be troubled if she is being taught by male teachers, or if there are inadequate toilet facilities. Some of these doubts are grounded in fears of sexual abuse—but parents can be equally sensitive to the innuendo and rumour that might undermine their daughter's marriage prospects. All of these worries will tend to reduce a girl's chances of going to secondary school.

Decisions about whether a child should go to school become more critical during times of economic crisis. Families desperate for survival will need as many hands at work as possible. And when governments are strapped for cash, they may choose to starve schools of funds or make extra charges for tuition or books.

The factors influencing these decisions may change over time. Thus if different jobs become available that make it more worthwhile to educate girls, parents may come to different conclusions. Data from the Philippines and Thailand, for example, suggest that the expansion of employment opportunities for girls is encouraging parents to invest more in their education. But labour market changes can also be damaging. An OECD/UNESCO survey of literacy levels in seven industrialized countries revealed that, on average, over 20 per cent of adults have low literacy and numeracy

skills. This reflects not just the quality of schooling, but also of the lack of “fit” between the skills developed through schooling and the skill requirements of particular work and cultural environments. The declining enrolment in formal education in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is also being viewed with some alarm.

DONOR-DRIVEN EDUCATION REFORMS

The Jomtien Conference in Thailand in 1990 was a landmark for international education policy. It emphasized the need for greater attention to basic education, identifying this as one of the most important ways of promoting human rights, fighting poverty and empowering women. Basic education includes pre-school, primary and adult education.

The 1980s and 1990s, however, were also years of economic crisis and structural adjustment programmes—which affected governments' and parents' abilities to improve children's educational opportunities. The majority of African governments that adopted structural adjustment programmes reduced the proportion of GNP they spent on education.

In principle, the governments of developing countries accepted the importance of educating girls, but in practice most of the impetus for change has come from donors—multilateral and bilateral. The most decisive pronouncements on education have come from the World Bank. For example, the Bank has been a major participant in a research programme measuring “rates of return on education” (ROREs)—and has drawn some policy conclusions from it that have major implications for resource allocation to and within the education sector.

The World Bank's policy directives have had two main parts. The first was a concentration on primary education, which was thought to offer the best value for money. This was partly because primary education was cheaper:

the same sum of money could cover more pupils than when spent at secondary or tertiary levels.

But the basis of the World Bank's policy conclusions has been challenged on several points. The evidence for the higher rates of return on primary education compared to secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is ambiguous and there are many counter-examples. Moreover, the analysis has tended to be static: rates of return calculated for one period may not be valid under different economic conditions. In fact, rates of return for primary education in sub-Saharan Africa have tended to fall during periods of economic crisis. Thus an education policy based on rates of return can produce a tragic situation in which educational institutions are starved of funds because of their apparently low rates of return—as measured at a particular point in time.

Some of the benefits of primary education were economic: an educated population would boost national productivity. Others were concerned with family welfare—particularly health and fertility. Educating a girl was thought to be especially valuable, since when she became a mother she could improve her family's standards of hygiene, nutrition and health. Just as important, an educated mother was expected to have a smaller family. She would be likely to marry later and know more about contraception. And she would have a better chance of working outside the home—which would decrease the time available for looking after children. Primary education would thus result in smaller families.

Governments who accepted this analysis tried to achieve universal access to education—and to make sure that girls had the same opportunities as boys. Thus Bangladesh, for example, introduced a Food for Education Project. It gave poor households that sent their children to school 15 kilograms of wheat per student—this, not surprisingly, resulted in a sudden boost in enrolment.

The Bank's second main policy thrust in education has been concerned with efficiency and managerial reform. As in most other aspects of public sector expenditure, governments and donors have been looking for ways to make education systems more cost-effective. First, there have been efforts to decentralize education, shifting more control over schools to regional and local levels—on the grounds that local people can monitor activities more effectively. Second, there have been moves to privatize education systems, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. Third, within the public sector there have been attempts to introduce or increase user fees. These fees can take many forms: in Nicaragua, for example, schools charge rents on textbooks. In Zambia, parents are expected to contribute to the parent-teacher association and the school fund as well as paying for books.

These two main parts of the Bank's policy directives—maximizing access while trying to operate more cost-effectively—are to some extent contradictory. Access is usually diminished by user fees, which deter the poorest parents. So it is not surprising that the results are mixed. For the developing countries as a whole, there does seem to have been an increase in access, at least in terms of primary enrolment. But drop-out rates remain high, and there is also evidence of sharp differentiation across social and economic categories.

Moreover, as chapter 2 indicates, developing country governments wanting to prove to donors and international creditors that they are spending more on primary education—at a time when budgetary resources are not increasing—have reduced the coverage and quality of other services like secondary education and vocational training. This trend is particularly worrying given that the availability of good-quality, secondary education—that is physically and socially accessible—has been found to influence primary school participation, par-

ticularly for girls. And ironically, it has been shown that the much-publicized benefits of female education, in particular fertility decline, tend to set in at higher levels of schooling. In other words, primary schooling alone does not produce significant effects.

QUALITY LAGS BEHIND QUANTITY

Increased access to education is vital for girls. But there is little evidence that education on its own will improve women's situation. It may simply improve their capacity to become more efficient mothers and housewives—or even their capacity to play a subordinate role. Women in industrialized countries have long had equal educational access but, as the first section of this chapter shows, this has yet to register in terms of political power.

Part of the problem lies in schools themselves, which tend to reflect the values of the wider society. They are designed to produce another generation of citizens similar to the previous one. As a result, many girls find they are being schooled for subordination. Textbooks and lessons still bear gender stereotypes. Teachers—both male and female—often give more attention to boys and distribute responsibilities in school in gender-biased ways. Girls may routinely do housekeeping tasks that boys would regard as a punishment. In Zimbabwe, for example, one study found that teachers felt it was their duty to guide pupils toward “gender-appropriate” behaviours. And in textbooks, women are presented as housewives who cook and clean and nag; the father takes the important decisions, while the mother is just the supporter.

Women may also find that non-formal education has many of the same defects. The delegates at Jomtien committed themselves to improving standards of informal education. But this has received far less attention from donors—and minimal funding. Most of the work has been left to NGOs. Generally, they

have emphasized literacy training, information on health and nutrition, and activities for income generation—often reflecting many of the same gender biases as formal education, assuming that women need to be prepared for a role as “helper”. Similar biases are evident in vocational training, where women tend to be confined to such areas as sewing or cookery.

But just as education can perpetuate existing gender roles, it can also help to subvert them. A number of positive examples have emerged in South Asia. In India, the Shikshakarmi Programme of the Rajasthan government has opened up access for girls in remote areas by making schools more flexible in their timing and location—and it has also helped enhance the status of women. In Bangladesh, BRAC is one of the best-known examples of a non-formal programme that draws women into relevant and useful education. But there have been many others. The REFLECT approach to women's literacy—developed in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador—not only promotes basic literacy but also enables women to reflect on their own circumstances and take individual or collective action. Nevertheless, recent education reforms driven by public austerity measures have struck at teachers, rather than supporting them as the lynchpins of efforts to improve the quality of education. Demoralized teachers and systems starved of funds can rarely make for innovative education programmes.

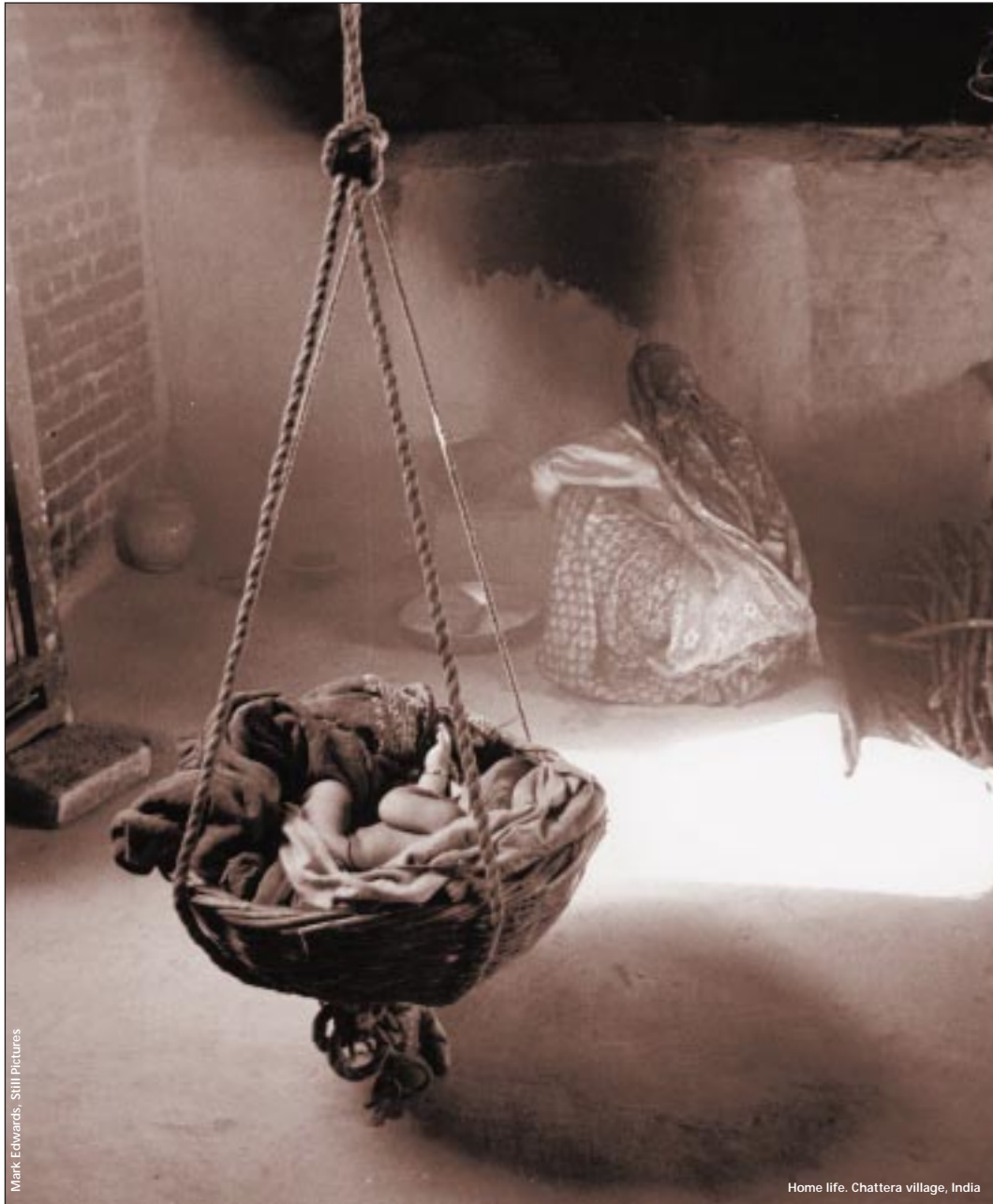
Women's economic rights

One of the benefits of education for women should be to enhance their economic entitlements. Women are certainly more likely to be working than ever before. Between the 1950s and the end of the 1990s, the proportion of women aged 20–59 who were in the labour force increased from around one third to one half. The current participation rates by region range from 14 per cent in North Africa to

76 per cent in East and Central Europe (figure 7.2). To some extent the increase in participation is a statistical artefact—it reflects better ways of recording seasonal, unpaid family and casual wage labour.

But it does also reflect a number of real changes. First, more women must now work to ensure family survival—in the face of declining

real wages and the increased monetary cost of subsistence resulting from cutbacks in both public services and subsidies for staple foods. In an increasing proportion of two-adult households, both partners now work. Data from Latin America suggest that in at least one quarter of urban households, the female partner works—and contributes, on average, around 30



Mark Edwards, Still Pictures

Home life. Chattera village, India

per cent of the household's income. Without women's income, the poverty indices in most Latin American countries would rise by 10 to 20 per cent.

A second factor is the increase in the number of women-headed households—in which women are required to meet the monetary cost of household survival from their own labour.

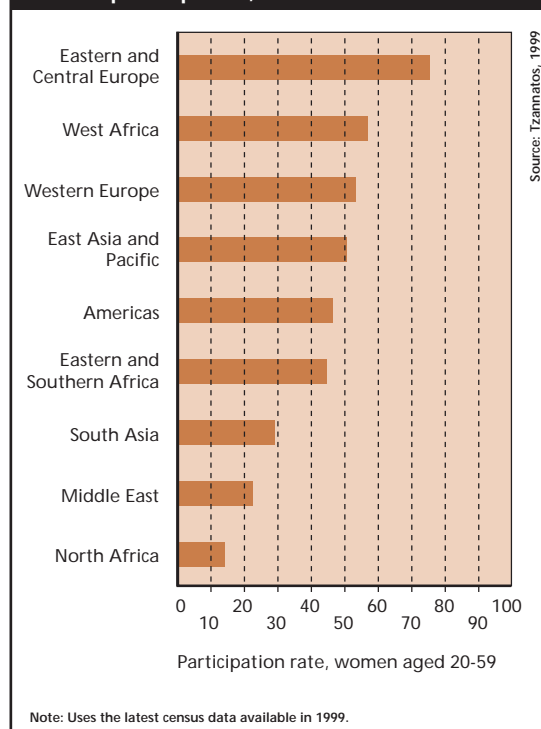
A third reason is that there has been a greater demand for women workers in particular sectors of the economy that have experienced long-term growth. Many industries employing a high proportion of women have expanded rapidly in response to globalization. Much of this is low-skilled manufacturing—notably in garments, footwear and electronic products—and “non-traditional” agricultural products such as cut flowers, seasonal fruits and vegetables. At the same time, with the increasing emphasis on cost-cutting competitiveness, firms have been searching for ways to reduce their labour costs. This has often meant changes in the structure of the labour market—away from formal, full-time employment with entitlements, such as unemployment and sickness insurance, pensions and maternity benefits. Instead, people must work in more flexible ways—whether part-time, temporary or casual. And this is more likely to involve women. In most industrialized countries, women make up 70 to 80 per cent of part-time employees. Women also make up the majority of home-workers. In Argentina more than four fifths of waged home-workers in the clothing and footwear industries are women.

In many cases, women's participation has increased at the expense of men's. In half the developing countries for which data were available, over the period 1975–95 the female participation rate rose while the male rate fell. The global labour force has become more female—rising from 36 per cent in 1960 to 40 per cent by 1997. Is labour force participation translated into economic rights?

Opportunities for work and income have transformed the lives of millions of women. Increased levels of education and changing methods of production mean that women are more likely to be found in positions of greater responsibility. But there is still some way to go. Because of increasing labour market flexibility, it has been very difficult for women to translate labour market participation into economic entitlements—which can be conceived of as rights—through engaging in paid employment.

The conditions of work in sectors where women are now working are far from adequate. In export manufacturing and agribusiness, women rarely have contracts of employment that guarantee adequate job security, training opportunities, unemployment and sickness insurance, or pensions. In globalized agribusiness, for example, advances in communications, transportation and refrigeration have made it possible for corporations to supply Northern markets with fruit and vegetable

Figure 7.2 – Women's labour force participation, 1980s and 1990s



products from the South. These products range from Chilean kiwis to South African grapes and Colombian flowers. In Chile, for example, women in the export fruit sector work on temporary contracts—or no contracts at all—and so cannot accrue sufficient time in a job to have entitlement to maternity benefits, sickness leave and other social security provisions. And there is ample evidence of women suffering sexual harassment.

Women working in the feminized manufacturing sector fare little better. Many face health hazards—both physical and mental. The work is often repetitive, monotonous and fast, and it involves long working hours and exposes women workers to carcinogens. This very often leaves young workers prematurely “burned out” in the labour process. And in the case of clerical work, such as data entry, for industrialized countries there is considerable evidence of muscular-skeletal disorders, eyesight injuries, stress and fatigue, skin conditions and reproductive problems.

In recent years there has also been some controversy over the issue of gender wage gaps. Some observers claim that men’s and women’s earnings have converged. But such conclusions can only be regarded as tentative, given the poor quality of national statistical evidence—which does not endorse the hypothesis of general wage convergence. Moreover, where there has been some evidence of convergence—in Canada during 1990–91, for example—it has resulted from male wages dropping rather than female wages rising. In other words, men’s and women’s wages may have converged, but this has happened through a process of harmonizing down—hardly the ideal way to achieve gender equality.

The precarious nature of women’s work also means that they are more likely to be unemployed. In the industrialized countries, unemployment rates for women can be 50 to 100 per cent higher than those for men. In developing

countries the trend is less consistent. In the newly industrialized economies of Asia, for example, unemployment rates are higher for men than women, but in South Asia women fare much worse than men.

The increase in women’s economic participation in the global economy has thus been paralleled by a deregulation in the conditions of work and in work-related entitlements. This relationship must challenge the view that increased participation in global markets brings those outside “economic citizenship” into a situation where their economic rights can be exercised and entitlements accessed through labour market activity.

WORK AND EMPOWERMENT

The opportunity to work outside the home has opened up new vistas for millions of women. Even the difficult and low-paid work in the garment factories of Bangladesh has transformed the prospects of the million or so women now working there. Every morning the streets of Dhaka are crowded with confident young women striding to work.

But to what extent does this constitute empowerment? If women are bringing wages into the home, this should give them a stronger bargaining position. In some instances this does happen: women who are earning wages have been able to renegotiate the terms of their domestic relationships, and some women have been able to walk out of, or not enter into, unsatisfactory relationships. But not always. A number of other studies in South Asia have found that many women still hand their wages over to their husbands.

Moreover, even if women wage earners have increased scope for manoeuvre at home, they may be subject to different patriarchal controls in the factory. This helps keep women workers poorly paid and vastly unprotected in jobs that are sometimes dangerous.

From a gender perspective, the most persis-

tent problem is the lack of connection between production and reproduction. Market economies assume that new workers appear costlessly at the factory gates—already healthy, nourished and educated. All the employer must do is pay for that day's labour. While in industrialized countries the state takes some of the responsibility for social reproduction, in developing countries the task remains primarily one for women. The women working in the garment factories in Dhaka have plenty to do when they get home: a survey in 1990–91 found that they were not only undertaking more hours of paid work than men—56 hours per week compared to men's 53 hours—they were also doing 31 hours per week of unpaid household work, compared with only 13 hours done by men.

STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Men and women have very different experiences in a market economy. Fortunately, there is now much greater recognition of this—and there have been initiatives at many levels to address the related problems. Women's groups have been lobbying to ensure that gender issues are raised in national and international institutions. Women in Development in Europe is a group that has been pressing for gender issues to be raised in trade negotiations. And a number of countries, including Australia, Barbados, Canada and South Africa, now have Women's Budget Statements to review national budgets for their impact on women.

There have also been greater efforts to organize women workers. Women and men alike have been affected by the weakening of trade unions. This is partly due to the more flexible nature of employment, which is less likely to produce a stable workforce. But it has also been deliberate policy to exclude trade unions from many of the factories where women work. Women make up around 90 per cent of the workforce in the 850 or so Export Processing

Zones around the world, where they are generally denied the rights to organize.

Although trade unions have had limited success, there has been support from women's NGOs. They have been active, for example, in the *maquila* factories of Mexico and Central America, which assemble final products from imported goods and parts. In Mexico, Women Group X offers women *maquila* workers education and various types of support, including protection from sexual abuse. A similar centre has been established to support young women workers in Lamphun in northern Thailand.

Women's groups have also made efforts to organize women working in the informal sector. One of the best known-models is the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), in India, which is concerned with its members' productive and reproductive roles—providing services for individual traders as well as child-care and maternity services. Likewise, the Kenya Women Workers Organization brings together women outside traditional trade union structures. One of the most important developments for individual women entrepreneurs has been the extension of micro-credit services. The Grameen Bank is the highest-profile example, but a high proportion of NGOs and international development agencies are now promoting micro-credit for low-income women based on similar systems of group solidarity. These may improve women's economic situation—but very often, with their inflexible repayment schedules, they can also add to women's stress and expose them to harassment from family members (who may be using the loans) and those dispensing and recovering the loans. Still, it does appear that the collective aspects of these services—which bring women out of their narrow domestic environments—do improve women's well-being and give them greater autonomy.

It is vital to improve the opportunities and rewards for working women. But in a world where many social service duties are being

assigned to communities and families, the crucial issue is still that of women's responsibility for family care. Until there is a greater recognition of the links between work and social reproduction, women's greater participation in the workforce will simply reflect and perpetuate existing gender biases. Fortunately, as more women have become regular labour force participants, there is greater recognition of the importance of the range of reproductive and caring services they provide. Loss of "economic citizenship" while absent from the labour force to fulfil the role of care-giver has therefore become more transparent. To overcome the existing bias in systems of social protection, "care" must become a dimension of citizenship—entailing rights equal to those associated with employment.

A counter-alliance for women

Women's groups and NGOs have become increasingly visible and vocal at both national and international levels. Their commitment and expertise shaped the character of the UN conferences of the 1990s. At the same time, the conferences themselves, and the UN system, have provided a vital forum and a framework through which a transnational women's movement coalesced. At the national level, democratization has meant that the state now speaks the language of gender equality and equity, and there are more opportunities for interaction between women's advocates in civil society and gender bureaucrats inside public administration.

Yet despite advances in women's formal rights, a number of persistent problems limit the degree to which these rights result in tangible gains for the vast majority of women citizens. Economic crises and market-driven policies are in ascendance everywhere and cast a shadow over these achievements. As a result, formal rights have not been matched by substantive rights or, for most women, by an

improvement in their quality of life.

The restructuring of the social sectors in particular imposes a disproportionate burden on working women—especially those from the poorer social strata—who are forced to stretch their already long working days in order to compensate for public sector shortfalls.

Even the proliferation of transnational NGO activity in recent years has a sobering underside—hazards such as bureaucratism and donor dependence. Women's groups and NGOs have not escaped such dangers. If they want to maintain their legitimacy and their claim to be representative of women's interests, women's NGOs and their leaders will have to strengthen their ties to women's grassroots social movements and community-based organizations. At the same time, women's NGOs also need to work more closely with other development NGOs and movements that are attempting to change global macroeconomic policies and structures. This would improve understanding of the linkages between personal and social rights—especially for women—and also form a stronger force for social change.