

Development  
Issue Papers  
for the 1980s

*"The issue of inequality, as it affects the vast majority of the women of the world, is closely linked with the problem of underdevelopment, which exists as a result not only of unsuitable internal structures but also of a profoundly unjust world economic system."*

Declaration of Mexico

# WOMEN AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the developing countries have called for the establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). Among the most important recommendations have been those advocating changes in present world structures with regard to international trade, the transfer of resources for financing development, the international monetary system, science and technology, industrialization and food and agriculture.

To find out how women in developing countries feel a New International Economic Order would affect the female half of the population, UNDP commissioned women writers from the Arab World, Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean to deal with this topic from a regional perspective. While the space limitations of this paper make it impossible to cover their comprehensive analyses in detail, an attempt is made to treat the issues they consider most crucial.

### A. BACKGROUND

#### 1. Women's work

Women -- one half the world's population -- perform two thirds of our planet's work hours.

For many women the world over, a 16-hour work day is the norm. This portrait of the African rural woman, for example, compiled by the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), describes the life of 80 per cent of that continent's female population:

"She rises before dawn and walks to the fields. In the busy seasons, she spends some nine to ten hours hoeing, planting, weeding or harvesting. She brings food and fuel home from the farm, walks long distances for water and carrying a pot which may weigh 20 kilogrammes or more, grinds and pounds grains, cleans the house, cooks while nursing her infant, washes the dishes and the clothes, minds the children, and generally cares for the household. She processes and stores food and markets excess produce, often walking long distances with heavy loads in difficult terrain. She must also attend to the family's social obligations such as weddings and funerals. She may have to provide fully for herself and her children. During much of the year she may labour for 15 to 16 hours each day and she works this way until the day she delivers her baby, frequently resuming work within a day or two of delivery."

Officially, though, women make up only one third of the labour force world-wide. International Labour Organisation (ILO) Labour Force Estimates (1950 - 1975) and Projections (1975 - 2000) show that the proportion of women classified as "economically active" reaches 35 per cent or higher in many African and Asian countries, while rates of around 20 per cent are common in Latin America. In the Arab States and other countries where there are strong taboos against women working outside the home, rates consistently fall below 5 per cent.

#### Unrecorded work

The official statistics are deceptive because they refer to only a fraction of the work women actually do. Omitted from the ledgers are arduous and time-consuming domestic tasks such as gathering, producing and processing food for the family, caring for children, and fetching fuel and water.

Other work not recorded as far as women are concerned includes unpaid labour on the farm or in other family enterprises. Dr. Karima Korayem, Associate Professor of Economics, El-Azhar University, Cairo, gives an example:

"Usually, the wife working in the field is not counted by her husband as one of the workers that help him with the field work, when he is asked by the data collector about this piece of information. In Syria, for example, when they asked the heads of the families about the number of hours their wives spend on the fields and, whether in the case of the wife's absence they would have hired paid labour, it was found that the females' participation in agriculture is much higher than what the data reveal." (Official figures show 10.6 per cent of Syrian women in the labour force, of whom 65.2 per cent work in agriculture.)

Excluded, too, are activities performed in households where there is "occupational multiplicity" (i.e., many different kinds of work done, and therefore difficult to record); and patron/client relationships, with poor women assisting those who are better off, sometimes receiving meals in return. Claudette Earle, Features Editor, Guyana National Newspapers, points this out:

"As invisible and neglected statistically as rural food producers are those Caribbean women who produce goods and services for the wider community and use their earnings to supplement family income....(They) are often head of the family unit and are compelled to seek methods of earning which will not demand too much of their time away from home and their young children.

To earn 'extras' women wash clothes and do ironing for better-off families; they do gardening and baby-sitting on a job basis; women prepare and vend food for workers on construction and industrial sites; they sell drinks and items of confectionery at cinemas, car-parks, bus terminals and at big social events; they sell newspapers on a daily basis; they buy and sell fruits and vegetables, do small-scale farming and sell some of their produce; they participate in cottage industries such as basketry, needlework and other craft, fruit-processing for cake making, cassava bread, cassava starch, jams and jellies; they make bread and cakes on a weekly or daily basis. Other women with more skills produce children's garments, soft toys, and items of household accessories."

Of course, the pattern of female employment differs from country to country. In some areas, growing numbers of women are entering the labour force as nurses, teachers, sales clerks, secretaries, and factory workers, and in other jobs which have traditionally been considered female. A privileged few are moving into professional, executive and administrative positions.

But the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of women in developing countries have little chance for advancement. Day after day, they continue to engage in laborious work which is either not remunerated at all, since it is of a subsistence nature and consequently not considered "productive", or paid at a very low rate, since it falls into the category of unskilled labour.

Women receive only 10 per cent of the world's income.

They own less than 1 per cent of the world's property.

#### 2. Consequences -- for women and their families

Theories as to why women in so many different societies have historically been relegated to those jobs bringing the least financial rewards vary -- from biologically-oriented "anatomy is destiny" hypotheses which see house- hold-centered and nurturing roles automatically falling to those who bear children, to feminist views of power structures established by males, within which women are to be permanently subjugated and controlled.

But there is no disagreement over the fact that chronic overwork and exploitation of the developing world's female population has very damaging consequences, both for women themselves, and for society as a whole. These are felt, for example, in terms of:

#### Health

- ... women have little resistance to tropical diseases and other endemic illnesses; infant mortality remains high;
- ... exhaustion and lack of time may keep women from taking essential preventive health measures which could improve family well-being (e.g., they may obtain drinking water from a nearby contaminated source, rather than walking to a distant safe supply);

#### Education and training

- ... Lack of time for and access to studies prevent the acquisition of knowledge and skills which could lead to more rewarding jobs ... or improved knowledge of nutrition and sanitation which could be applied to family care;
- ... hopes for future generations fade as young girls drop out of school to help their overburdened mothers;

#### Development planning

- ... perception of female work as not "productive" (i.e., not contributing to GNP) often leads to a failure to plan for women's needs: their activities are excluded from the planning process;

#### Low status

- ... since money and status are generally linked inextricably, women are permanently kept in subordinate positions: they fail to participate in decisions which affect their lives.

Nina Vyas of India's The Statesman newspaper sums it up: "Women's social and political status is directly linked to her economic status. The dependence of one on the other is so close that a vicious circle has been established. The low social status prevents women from being given the opportunity to take more active part in productive roles, and this in turn leads to her low social status."

### B. WOMEN'S WORK IN A NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER

#### 1. Goals for a new order

The present world economic order, in which 70 per cent of the world's population accounts for only 30 per cent of its income, is characterized by:

- ... an unequal relationship between developed and developing countries, with power and affluence concentrated in the former;

- ... dependency of developing countries on developed ones for essential goods and services;

- ... poverty in developing countries, with a widening gap between them and the developed world.

Proposals for restructuring the world economy to redress present imbalances include:

- ... expansion and diversification of trade to enable developing countries to obtain fair and stable prices for their commodities, and to increase their share of the world's manufactured goods;

- ... increased industrialization of the developing world;

- ... improved access to science and technology for the developing countries;

- ... augmented food production in developing countries.

What are the implications of these proposals for women? According to Haydee B. Birgin of Mexico's Centre for Studies on the Third World:

"The question is not women's integration in development, as women are active agents in the development process. What is important is the consideration of the concrete ways in which women are participating in development. That is, a redefinition in the context of a new type of development (the basis of an NIEO) -- of the modalities of women's participation: in what and how they participate."

#### 2. Women and commodities

One reason for present skewed relationships stems from the fact that the economies of many developing countries are based on a limited number of cash crops, grown for world markets. A colonial legacy, the tendency to concentrate on the production of bananas, sugar, cotton, tea, coffee, rubber, jute, copra, etc. has often led to a decrease in the production of food for internal consumption. This has made it necessary for developing countries to meet domestic needs through sizable imports. Moreover, since prices of raw materials have been highly volatile on world markets, developing countries have often suffered from sudden price drops in those commodities upon which they are all but solely dependent for foreign exchange.

The NIEO recommendations strongly advocate formation of producers' associations through which developing countries might negotiate fair and stable prices for their raw materials. If this is achieved -- and if increased revenues reach the level of the producer -- it is possible that women will benefit along with all segments of society.

However, it is equally possible that they will not.

If cash crops become more profitable, the natural tendency will be to further expand their production. But, as Ms. Birgin says,

"Greater production does not always mean greater productivity, and even less, better living conditions for workers. For this reason, the central issue in the NIEO is not just 'Production', but how to produce and for whom, since different forms of production have different effects on society as a whole."

Fibi Thara Munene of Kenya's Nation newspaper tells what has happened in East Africa:

"Introduction of cash crops has increased the burden of the already overworked rural women. The time-consuming work like weeding is entrusted to them. They pick tea leaves, coffee berries and cotton and often they are the ones to carry the crop to markets or factories. This is in addition to producing or fetching much of the food for the family's subsistence. This disproportionate load on the back of the rural women is rendered even more burdensome by the lack of any new techniques designed to make their work lighter. Most work that involves new tools is done by men.....Thus, the new cash crop business has demoted women from independent producers of food to exploited labourers without any share in the money from the sale of cash crops. In most of Eastern Africa, cash crops have come to be known as 'men's crops'".

The situation is no different in the Cameroon, as Perpetua Abea Ntche of Radio Cameroon reports:

"The women's work in cocoa production has always been and still is to make the pods cut from trees by men into piles ready for podding, to feed the work party which the plantation owner calls, to degrain the pods, to work on the pods themselves, and to supervise the drying of the beans. The peak of the cocoa season coincides with the weeding season for the women's groundnut plots. So the women have to manage both activities."

Governments often provide more support for cash crop cultivation, Mrs. Ntche continues:

"...most of government intervention programmes have been in respect of export cash crops. This is because the government often gets a large part of its revenue from export taxes of cash crops. At least 30 per cent of government budget both during colonial and present time is obtained from cash crops."

And women's burdens increase, as Ms. Munene explains:

"As cash crops take up more agricultural land and population increases, land scarcity means that women must walk long distances to cultivate food for their families. In some parts of Kenya entire farm holdings have been planted with cash crops and as a result, women have no land to grow food for their families and for selling and this has left them entirely dependent on the incomes of their husbands. The fact that no action is being taken to ensure that each land holding has a balanced food and cash crops utilization is due to laws which do not give due recognition to women in agriculture."

### 3. Women and industrialization

Industrialization is deemed essential to enable developing countries to become less dependent upon developed countries for their manufactured goods, and so that they may obtain a greater share of the world's industrial exports. Redeployment to developing countries of industries which are less competitive internationally is advocated. It has been stated that the share of developing countries in global industrial output -- now less than 10 per cent -- should be increased to 25 per cent by the year 2000.

New industries can bring new jobs for women. Estrella Miranda Maniquis of Press Foundation of Asia in the Philippines notes:

"Female employment continues to be curtailed by protectionist measures, many female labour-intensive industries being among those primarily affected. ...The recent move by the U.S. to allow certain imports to enter tax-free and others to receive significant tariff duty cuts is an indication that developed countries are beginning to concede to the fact that the interests of rich and poor nations are not mutually exclusive. Among the Philippine exports to benefit from tariff cuts by the U.S. are wooden utensils, garments and textiles, and gloves, the production of which utilizes female labour extensively."

But experience shows that this will not necessarily be to their advantage, for women are often exploited. Ms. Earle gives an illustration:

"Dhankumarie is a 26 year old Indo-Guyanese who is a machinist at a leading garment factory in Guyana. Her job is to stitch on yokes to the backs of shirts. Dhankumarie is unmarried and childless and lives with her parents in the Greater Georgetown area. She earns \$44 per week, and her take home pay totals \$37 after deductions for union dues, income tax and national insurance. With the Government minimum wage in Guyana being fixed at \$11 per day, Dhankumarie and her sister women at the garment factory earn about half of the minimum wage."

A pattern with regard to women's employment has already been established in many countries where there is already some degree of industrialization. From the (male) factory owner's point of view, maintaining this status quo may be highly desirable, and limit women's chances for advancement. Ms. Maniquis explains:

"A general observation is that the employment of women in light industries is increasing because females have displayed more patience (consequently, greater efficiency) with relatively monotonous jobs such as work in the assembly of garment parts, semi-conductors in electronics, packing of cigarettes, and others. This factor constitutes both an edge and a disadvantage for female workers in that they qualify for more jobs but such jobs are neither mentally rewarding nor emotionally satisfying."

#### Health hazards and social disruptions

Ms. Birgin tells how the development of agro-industries may pose especially severe problems for women:

"We might ask why agro-industry shows a preference for women workers. The answer is obviously not to be found in an ethical premise of the NIEO. From interviews taken in rural areas, one can see that firms are taking advantage of the dual nature of the job market to obtain cheaper labour. The female work force is on the whole untrained, lacking in a tradition of union organizing, and understandably part-time, due to the needs of the family structure. This results in lower wages and, therefore, a reduction in the costs of labour of agro-industry."

"Women's work is by and large seasonal," she continues, "done primarily at harvest time. Women are paid the minimum wage, but they often work over the legal eight hours, and thus their real wages actually fall below the minimum. Their labour is on a piece-work basis. Rural workers are not covered by Social Security, as the discontinuous nature of this work makes Social Security difficult to apply. This work is also frequently hazardous to women's health, as the use of chemicals (used to control diseases attacking strawberries, for instance) is quite dangerous."

Industrialization may also bring social disruptions. When factories open in towns, men flock to take advantage of new jobs, leaving rural women alone as heads of households. Exposure to new mores and lifestyles comes with increased opportunities for employment. Appetites are created among women for stylish clothes and luxury items they can ill afford, and for processed foods which may be easier to prepare, but cost more and are of limited nutritional value.

"It could indeed be argued," says Ms. Birgin, "That the increase in women's participation in the job market results in a corresponding deterioration of their living conditions due to the disarticulation of the family structure. Women's work is a problem for the whole family. For this reason state planning cannot expose it to the free play of supply and demand without risk of undermining the family structure."

#### 4. Women and science and technology

Within a New International Economic Order, developing countries would have a choice of available technologies. Their own technological and scientific capabilities would be expanded.

Women could certainly benefit substantially from technologies designed to meet their special needs. They could likewise gain if they were given access to new technologies and technical education and training.

Again, experience shows the trend to be the opposite. Machines and new techniques, together with training in their use, are usually provided only for men.

For example, the mechanization and modernization of agriculture rarely extends to women, despite the fact that, in developing countries as a whole, rural women account for at least 50 per cent of food production. High-yield seeds, new tools and machines, fertilizers and training in improved farming techniques have all been virtually unavailable to them.

In Africa, women do 60 to 80 per cent of all agricultural work. Yet, as Ms. Munene relates, cash crop extension officers "follow farmers in the rural areas and teach them how to produce quality coffee, tea, cotton or sisal but the service is hardly ever extended to food crop farmers, most of whom are women. They are still using the tools that their grandmothers used for weeding, harvesting and preparing land for planting."

As seen above, the introduction of new technologies for growing cash crops can actually make life more difficult for women. Meanwhile, lacking tools which might make digging, planting, weeding, harvesting, thrashing and winnowing more efficient, women are unable to raise their productivity.

#### Loss of income

The introduction of new technologies may also deprive women of vital income, shifting jobs for which they have traditionally been responsible to men. Ms. Vyas explains:

"In the tobacco industry a large number of women have been employed in the rolling of 'bidis' (cheap Indian cigarettes). The trend is downward now with modernization of the tobacco industry. Technology and modernization of industries have almost invariably resulted in retrenchment of women workers employed mainly in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Their low social status, lack of education and other factors have come in their way when competing for better jobs."

The decline in women's participation in India's employed labour force (from 23.3 per cent in 1951 to 12.7 per cent in 1971), Ms. Vyas says, "is one of the direct results of the strategy for increased agricultural productivity through the Green Revolution. Mechanized farming benefited the bigger farmers the most, and led to a fall in rural employment with adverse effects on women's employment. Even where mechanization was not involved, simple improvements in the production process -- improved irrigation facilities with a spurt in consumption of fertilizers -- led to increased productivity without increase in employment."

#### Beneficial technologies

On the other hand, the introduction of relatively simple technologies can save rural women hours of backbreaking labour, reduce energy consumption and generally improve family health and well-being. Especially valuable are such devices as:

- .. low cost technologies for lifting water (hydraulic, hand, solar or wind pumps);
- .. safe storage facilities for storing food and water (easily-constructed silos; concrete jars);

- .. energy-efficient stoves requiring up to six times less fuel;
- .. aids to food preservation (solar driers; charcoal coolers);
- .. grain mills (pedal-operated or animal powered);
- .. inexpensive carts and wheelbarrows.

Other items, such as these described by Ms. Munene, can add to women's incomes:

"...improved bee-keeping equipment in Kenya has helped women to earn extra income. Traditionally, it was men who harvested honey from the wild bees. The hives were placed high up on trees, an exercise that women did not think was worth spending their energy on. But now the fact that the improved hives stand a few feet off the ground makes extraction of honey an easier work which women can undertake. Also, the new hives have increased honey yields and this is bringing in considerable profits to women bee-keepers."

"Where village technology has introduced low-cost animal pens and hutches, women supplement incomes from sales of handicrafts by keeping chickens, pigs, goats or rabbits. Previously, efforts to earn women extra cash centred around the production of handicrafts mostly for tourist and export markets. But now it is being realized throughout Eastern Africa that women should be encouraged to produce goods for which there is a permanent demand in the local markets."

Though women's access to technical training remains limited in many parts of the world, there is some evidence of improvement in the Philippines, says Ms. Maniquis:

"Training programmes abound for women, but not for skills which would qualify them for what are traditionally men's jobs, such as the handling of heavy machinery or agricultural equipment. On the other hand, neither are women discriminated against, and opportunities are always open for the more gutsy whose inclinations happen to tend toward men's occupations. Also, it has been noted that there has been a notable increase in the enrolment of females in agricultural courses in recent years."

### C. UNDP-SUPPORTED PROGRAMMES RELATED TO WOMEN AND THE NIEO

As the North/South dialogue continues, the UN development system is acting to increase the chances that women will share in the greater prosperity a new order promises.

UNDP and several other agencies of the system have issued programming guidelines to ensure that women's needs are not overlooked when projects and programmes are formulated. These have been supplemented by staff training and the designation of "promoters" of women's interests for various regions.

In addition, UNDP has produced a series of sound/slide films, accompanied by discussion guides, to sensitize planners to women's problems and needs. Here, the emphasis is on obtaining maximum participation of women themselves at all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation.

An inter-agency "Action Oriented Assessment of Rural Women's Participation in Development" was published by UNDP in June 1980. This study cites many projects in which women should be included, or their participation enhanced, and also gives multiple examples of projects through which women are gaining. An inter-organizational study of the means, modalities and effects of efforts to promote a more active and deliberate involvement of women in development within government projects and programmes supported by the UN development system will be issued in 1985.

Examples of UNDP-supported projects related to NIEO goals which deal directly with women's immediate needs can be found in:

Mali, Swaziland and Ethiopia. Work-saving devices have been introduced in rural areas to ease women's food preparation and fuel and water portage chores. The technologies have given them time for educational and income-earning activities through which the women have improved family health and well-being and increased household income.

Mexico. Agricultural extension services, including tips on family gardening and raising chickens, rabbits, livestock and bees have been extended to several thousand women, along with instruction in basic hygiene and nutrition, food preservation, and crafts production.

Indonesia. A project focused on 12 villages is providing women with equipment, raw materials, advice and training for the development of small-scale and cottage industries. More than 575 women are participating, producing ready-made clothing, batik, woven goods, plaited bamboo and silk products, embroidered articles, palm sugar and roof tiles. In many cases their earnings have increased by at least 25 to 30 per cent.

Though not designed specifically for women, other projects supported by UNDP and the agencies are providing people of both sexes with education and training in a variety of fields, including the areas of agriculture and food production, industrialization, and science and technology which figure so prominently in the NIEO negotiations. Thus, one finds women in Benin planting trees from which their daughters will obtain firewood, girls in the Philippines being trained as mechanics for the Philippine Airline (PAL), women engineers and scientists solving complex problems at Egypt's Engineering and Industrial Design Development Centre, etc.

#### Household surveys

Several projects through which the UN system is helping governments to develop their data-gathering and planning capacities should tend to increase the participation of women in future development activities, since they are contributing to the building up of a data base which will more accurately reflect the participation of women in the national economy. One of the largest, "The National Household Survey Capability Programme", was launched in 1979. It is designed to help governments obtain vital information for national development plans, policies and programmes through continuous and integrated household surveys. Nineteen countries have already begun implementing household survey programmes and it is expected that at least 45 to 50 countries will wish to take advantage of the programme over the next ten years. National survey capabilities will be enhanced while comprehensive data on the structure, composition and productive activity of household is collected.

### D. VIEWPOINT

How can a new order of real benefit to women be created, and what can women themselves do to bring this about?

The regional writers offer some views:

" the NIEO presumably will increase the supply of the education and job opportunities in the Arab region through the changes that it will make on the national level in the countries of the region. A relatively larger number of Arab women will be able, then, to be educated and employed. However, the sheer availability of education opportunities and job vacancies is not enough to expect a significant change in the education and the employment profile of the woman in the Arab region. The response of the Arab women to these chances is an important factor that should be taken into consideration."

Karima Korayem (Arab World)



"...the ultimate expression of women's economic well-being depends on the establishment of the New International Economic Order, and the fundamental commitment of the political will of individual economies to develop a programme of support mechanisms which will include child-care facilities, water supply, sewerage systems, health care, marketing facilities, training opportunities, access roads to farms and better conditions generally for working women. Then, Caribbean women will be able to assert their position in social production, both as agents of development and as beneficiaries of the material wealth generated by their contribution to the development effort."

Claudette Earle (Caribbean)

"It is well reecognized that the status of women as a whole has been low primarily because of their low economic status and lack of economic independence. It is their productive role that would determine their participation in decision-making and their recognition as human beings in society. Any change in the world economic order must be radical enough for the South Asian region to ensure not only a faster rate of growth but also a corresponding growth in effective employment, including that of women."

Nina Vyas (Asia)

"Women who are caught in pockets of poverty are not the same as those who become part of the labour force. The latter women begin to play active roles on different levels in national society -- a society paradoxically more and more transnationalized. These women are new social actors on the economic stage who struggle to satisfy new needs; they are new conflictive protagonists. This is a concrete impact the implementation of the NIEO is having on women."

Haydee B. Birgin (Latin America)

"Although it is important to help women earn an independent income this in itself provides only a partial solution to women's problems. Change can only come if women are enlightened about their conditions and their economic, social and political potential. Legal status of Eastern African women may have to a large extent been brought at par with that of men but information about their rights has to find its way to the grassroots."

Fibi Thara Munene (East Africa)

"The NIEO's assistance in this area should include the development of intermediate technology, supply of important inputs in peasant agriculture, educational programmes for peasant women and the general reorganisation of production and marketing of peasant women's agricultural products. The first stage in the integration of women in development should be to teach them the necessity for change and the possibility to ameliorate the conditions of living in their regions. In order to do this there should be a study of the environment, identification of needs and a search for appropriate solutions that will solve the women's problems to their satisfaction."

Perpetua Abe Ntche (West Africa)

"Since opportunities are addressed to men rather than women, the latter have first to display initiative, aggressiveness and a competitive spirit in order to avail of skills training and incentives in the areas mentioned -- traits which are however often subdued by their primary duties as housekeepers and secondary farm workers."

Estrella Miranda Maniquis (Asia)

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