

PART I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

FACTUAL DATA ON THE WORLD'S WOMEN

The United Nations Report, *The World's Women, 1970–90*,¹ provides a wealth of statistical and other data relating to women's position in the world. This global survey reveals how inherent is the inferior position of women throughout the world:

THE WORLD'S WOMEN, 1970–90

Regional Trends: 1970–90

Over the past 20 years there have been important changes in what women do – out of choice or necessity, depending on the hardships and opportunities they face.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women in urban areas made some significant gains according to indicators of health, childbearing, education and economic, social and political participation, but there was little change in rural areas, and the serious macroeconomic deterioration of many Latin American countries in the 1980s undercut even the urban gains as the decade progressed.

In sub-Saharan Africa, there was some improvement for women in health and education, but indicators in these fields are still far from even minimally acceptable levels in most countries. Fertility remains very high, and there are signs that serious economic decline – coupled with rapid population growth – is undermining even the modest gains in health and education. Women's economic and social participation and contribution is high in sub-Saharan Africa. But given the large differences between men and women in most economic, social and political indicators at the start of the 1970s, the limited progress in narrowing those differences since then and the general economic decline, the situation for women in Africa remains grave.

In northern Africa and western Asia, women made gains in health and education. Fertility declined slightly but remains very high – 5.5 children in northern Africa and 5.3 in western Asia. Women in these regions continue to lag far behind in their economic participation and in social participation and decision-making.

In southern Asia, women's health and education improved somewhat. But as in Africa, indicators are still far from minimally acceptable levels – and are still very far from men's. Nor has economic growth, when it has occurred, helped women – apparently because of their low social, political and economic participation in both urban and rural areas.

In much of eastern and southeastern Asia, women's levels of living improved steadily in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the inequalities between men and women – in health, education and employment – were reduced in both urban and rural areas and fertility also declined considerably. Even so, considerable political and economic inequalities persist in much of the region – because women are confined to the lowest paid and lowest status jobs and sectors and because they are excluded from decision-making.

1 United Nations (1991).

Throughout the developed regions, the health of women is generally good and their fertility is low. But in other fields, indicators of the status of women show mixed results. Women's economic participation is high in eastern Europe and the USSR, northern Europe and northern America – lower in Australia, Japan, New Zealand and southern and western Europe. Everywhere occupational segregation and discrimination in wages and training work very much in favour of men. In political participation and decision-making, women are relatively well represented only in northern Europe and (at least until recently) eastern Europe and the USSR.

Gaps in policy, investment and pay

Resounding throughout the statistics in this book is one consistent message. Major gaps in policy, investment and earnings prevent women from performing to their full potential in social, economic and political life.

Policy gaps

Integration of women in mainstream development policies. The main policy gap is that governments seldom integrate the concerns and interests of women into mainstream policies. Development policies typically emphasise export oriented growth centred on cash crops, primary commodities and manufactures – largely controlled by men. Those policies typically neglect the informal sector and subsistence agriculture – the usual preserve of women. Even when women are included in mainstream development strategies, it is often in marginal women-in-development activities.

Much of this gap is embodied in laws that deny women equality with men in their rights to own land, borrow money and enter contracts. Even where women now have *de jure* equality, the failures to carry out the law deny equality *de facto*. Consider Uganda, which has a new constitution guaranteeing full equality for women. One women's leader there had this assessment: 'We continue to be second-rate citizens – no, third-rate, since our sons come before us. Even donkeys and tractors sometimes get better treatment'.²

Counting women's work. A second policy gap is that governments do not consider much of women's work to be economically productive and thus do not count it. If women's unpaid work in subsistence agriculture and housework and family care were fully counted in labour force statistics, their share of the labour force would be equal to or greater than men's. And if their unpaid housework and family care were counted as productive outputs in national accounts, measures of global output would increase 25% to 30%.

Even when governments do consider women's work to be economically productive, they overlook or undervalue it. Until recently, labour force statistics counted production narrowly, excluding such activities as grinding grain and selling home-grown food at the market. The International Labour Organisation widened the definition in 1982 but the application of the new standard is far from universal, and in most countries and regions only a small part of women's production is measured. Without good information about what women really do – and how much they produce – governments have little incentive to respond with economic policies that include women.

2 Miria Matembe, 'Speaking Out for Women in Abuja' (1989) *Africa Recovery*, vol 3, No 3, United Nations publication.

Investment gaps

Education. There are also big gaps between what women could produce and the investments they command. Households – and governments – almost always invest less in women and girls than in men and boys. One measure of this is enrolment in school: roughly 60% of rural Indian boys and girls enter primary school, but after five years, only 15% of the girls are still enrolled, compared with 35% of the boys.

The losses from investing less in girls' education are considerable. Studies in Malaysia show that the net return to education at all levels of wages and productivity is consistently 20% higher for girls and young women than for boys and young men. And that does not include the second-round benefits of reduced fertility, improved nutrition and better family care.

One consequence of women's low educational achievement is that it puts them at a disadvantage to their husbands when making major life decisions about the work they do, the number of children they have and the way they invest family income.

Health services. Another investment gap is in health services. Women need, and too seldom receive, maternal health care and family planning services. And families often give lower priority to the health care of girls than boys. Where health services are being cut back, as they so often are under economic austerity programmes, the health needs of women are typically neglected.

Productivity. These gaps in investing in women's development persist in the investments that governments might make to increase their economic productivity. Governments give little or no support to activities in which women predominate – notably, the informal sector and subsistence agriculture. Indeed, government policies typically steer women into less productive endeavours. The infrastructure that might underpin their work is extremely inadequate. And the credit available to them from formal lending institutions is negligible. Often illiterate, usually lacking collateral and almost always discriminated against, women must rely on their husbands or on high-priced moneylenders if they want to invest in more productive ventures.

Pay gaps

Lower pay. There also are big gaps between what women produce and what they are paid. Occupational segregation and discrimination relegate women to low-paying, low-status jobs. And even when women do the same work as men, they typically receive less pay – 30 to 40% less on average worldwide. Nor are their prospects for advancement the same as men's, with deeply rooted prejudices blocking them from the top.

No pay. Another pay gap is that much of women's work is not paid and not recognised as economically productive. The work is considered to be of no economic importance is not counted, which brings the discussion back to policy gaps.

Trends in childbearing and family life

Giving women the means to regulate their childbearing enhances their ability to shape their own lives. Modern family planning methods make it far easier for women today to limit their fertility and, as important, to pick the timing and spacing of their births. Almost everywhere, the access to and the use of family planning are increasing, but not as rapidly as they might.

Fertility rates are declining in many developing countries but remain at quite high levels in most countries in Africa, in the southern Asia region and in countries of western Asia. Influencing the falling rates are broader use of effective family planning methods, changing attitudes about desired family size and reductions in infant mortality. With the spread of modern contraception, women are better able to limit their fertility. But safe contraception must be available and accepted by both women and men, and in some societies men often do not allow women to practise family planning.

The childbearing gap between developed and developing regions remains wide. In Asia and Africa, a woman typically has her first child at about age 19 or even earlier, her last at 37, for a childbearing span of 18 years. In some countries – such as Bangladesh, Mauritania, Nigeria, the Sudan and Yemen – girls often start having children at age 15. Compare this with developed regions, where a woman typically has her first child at 23 and her last at 30, for a span of only seven years. Women in developed regions have fewer children over a shorter span of years and thus need to devote a smaller part of their lives to childbearing and parenting.

Family planning and health service have helped women in many ways – improving their overall health status and that of their children and increasing their opportunities to take an expanded role in society.

Childbearing exposes women to a particular array of health risks. But the broader availability of family planning and maternal health services has reduced some of the risks of pregnancy and childbirth – delaying the first birth, allowing longer spacing between births, and reducing pregnancies among women who have had four or more births and thus face the greatest risk of haemorrhaging after giving birth. Complications from childbearing nevertheless remain a major (avoidable) cause of death for women in many developing countries – especially where family planning services are poor or hard to reach, where malnutrition is endemic among pregnant women and where births are not attended by trained personnel.

Healthier mothers are more likely to have full-term pregnancies and strong children. With more resources, they are better able to nurture their children. Better educated mothers are more likely to educate their children. The positive outcome: healthier, better educated families.

Poor women generally miss out on this positive cycle. Because they have little or no education, they have little knowledge of health practices and limited economic opportunities. They have no collateral for borrowing to invest in more productive activities. Simply trying to ensure that the family survives takes all their time. The unhappy outcome: sick, poorly educated families – and continuing poverty.

Poor teenage girls, the most vulnerable of mothers, face even greater obstacles. Cultural pressures, scant schooling and inadequate information about and access to family planning make them most likely to have unhealthy or unwanted pregnancies. In developed and developing countries alike, mothers aged 15–19 are twice as likely to die in childbirth as mothers in their early twenties, and those under 15 are five times as likely. They are less likely to obtain enough education or training to ensure a good future for themselves and their children.

Trends in marriages and households

In developed and developing regions alike, women now spend less time married and fewer years bearing and rearing children. Couples are marrying later and

separating or divorcing more, in part because of their increased mobility and migration.

Throughout much of the world – the exceptions are in Asia and the Pacific – households are getting smaller and have fewer children. There are fewer multigenerational households, more single-parent families and more people living alone. Smaller households suggest the gradual decline of the extended family household, most evident in western developed countries, but also beginning to be apparent in developing countries. Also evident is a decline in the strength of kinship and in the importance of family responsibility combined with greater reliance on alternative support systems and greater variations in living arrangements,

Because more women are living (or forced to live) alone or as heads of households with dependents, their responsibility for their family's survival and their own has been increasing since 1970. Motherhood is more often unsupported by marriage and the elderly are more often unsupported by their children – trends that increase the burden on women. And even for women living with men, the man's income is often so inadequate that the woman must take on the double burden of household management and outside work to make ends meet.

Women face another burden that is invisible to the outside world: domestic violence. It is unmeasured but almost certainly very extensive. Domestic violence is masked by secretiveness and poor evidence, and there are social and legal barriers to its active prevention. Men's attacks on women in their homes are thought to be the least reported crimes – in part because such violence is seen as a social ill, not a crime. Women's economic independence – and the corresponding ability to leave an abusive man – are essential for preventing violence and for fostering self-esteem. And as the awareness of women's rights becomes more universal and enforceable, more women will be opposing domestic violence.

Economic life

Economic growth in many of the developed regions has provided new opportunities for women in economic participation, production and income – despite persistent occupational and wage discrimination and the continuing exclusion of women's unpaid housework from economic measurement.

Some countries in Asia and a few in other developing regions were also able to sustain strong economic growth rates, again providing new opportunities for women despite even more pervasive social and economic obstacles to their economic advancement. But in most countries in the developing regions, as well as in eastern Europe and the USSR, the economic outlook was far worse in 1990 than in 1970. And worldwide the population living in the poorest countries increased dramatically. This mixed economic growth has created new obstacles to women's economic participation and their progress towards equality with men – seriously undercutting previous advances. And whether in circumstances of economic growth or decline, women have been called on to bear the greater burdens, and receive the fewest benefits.

Women are the first to be dismissed from the salaried labour force by economic downturns and the contractions under stabilisation and adjustment programmes. With essentials less affordable because of rising inflation and falling subsidies, women have little choice but to work harder and longer. And when the demand for workers rises, as in Brazil in the late 1980s, the men find jobs at their old wages while the women must take jobs at even lower pay than before.

Women's working world

Women's working world continues to differ from men's in the type of work, the pay, the status and the pattern of entering and leaving the work force. The biggest difference is that women continue to bear the burden of managing the household and caring for the family and that men continue to control the resources for production and the income from it. In agriculture, for example, women continue to be left labour-intensive tasks that consume the most time.

Women everywhere contribute to economic production. As officially measured, 46% of the world's women aged 15 and over – 828 million – are economically active. At least another 10 to 20% of the world's women are economically productive but not counted as part of the labour force because of inadequate measurement.

Women are left to provide child care, to provide food and health care, to prepare and process crops, to market goods, to tend gardens and livestock and to weave cloth, carpets and baskets. Much of this work does not benefit from investment, making it very inefficient and forcing women to work very hard for meagre results. In the worst cases, technological investments end up exploiting women – improving their productivity but barring them from any access or control over the profits.

The pattern, then, is that women work as much or more than men. Although women spend less time in activities officially counted as economically productive and make much less money, they spend far more in home production. If a woman spends more time in the labour force, she still bears the main responsibility for home and family care, and sleep and leisure are sacrificed.

Men's participation in the labour force has fallen everywhere. Women's, by contrast, has fallen significantly only in sub-Saharan Africa, where economic crises have been most widespread. Women's share in the total labour force is increasing in most regions. In many parts of the developed regions, there have been increases in women's economic activity rates over the past two decades. Women's highest shares in wage and salaried employment are in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, something that could change as new economic policies create widespread unemployment there.

In Africa, most public and wage employees are men, leaving women either in subsistence agriculture or to create whatever opportunities they can in the informal sector.

In Asia and the Pacific, the picture is mixed. Women's economic activity rates (in official statistics) are very low (under 20%) in southern and western Asia, but fairly high (35 to 40%) in eastern and southeastern Asia. Women's wage and salary employment rose considerably (from 44 to 57% of the total, excluding southern Asia), reflecting significant expansion of economic opportunities for women.

In Latin America, women's economic participation grew fastest but remained at low levels (31% in urban areas, 14% in rural). The increase reflects greater economic necessities arising from the ongoing economic crises of the 1980s.

Occupational segregation and wage discrimination

Everywhere in the world the workplace is segregated by sex. Women tend to be in clerical, sales and domestic services and men in manufacturing and transport. Women work in teaching, care-giving and subsistence agriculture and men in

management, administration and politics. Looking at job categories in more detail reveals even sharper segregation. For example, in teaching, women predominate in elementary or first level education while men predominate in higher education.

Women hold a mere 10 to 20% of managerial and administrative jobs worldwide and less than 20% of the manufacturing jobs. In Singapore barely 1% of working women are in managerial work, compared with nearly 10% for a much larger number of working men. Even when women work in male dominated occupations, they are relegated to the lower echelons. Among all the organisations of the United Nations system, for example, women hold only 3% of the top management jobs and 8% of senior management positions, but 42% of the entry-level civil service slots, suggesting that women are not usually promoted or hired directly into higher levels. Of the top 1,000 corporations in the United States, only two are headed by a women, a mere two-tenths of 1%.³

In every country having data, women's non-agriculture wage rates are substantially lower than men's. In some countries, the gap is around 50% and in only a very few is it less than 30%. The average gap is between 30% and 40% and there is no sign that it is substantially narrowing.

Even where women have moved into occupations dominated by men, their income remains lower. Take Canada, where women have made solid inroads into administration, management, engineering, physical sciences, university teaching and law and medicine. Between 1971 and 1981 they accounted for nearly a third of the growth in these professions. Women in these professions earned about 15% more than women in other professional categories but they still lagged 15 to 20% behind their male counterparts.

The informal sector

One wedge of opportunity for women is the informal sector, including self-employment. Crucial to the survival strategies of many women, the informal sector also opens important long-term opportunities where salaried employment is closed to women, declining or inadequate. Women work in the informal sector because of necessity and convenience. It requires less skill and education. It has fewer biases in favour of men. And it is easier to reconcile with cultural norms that keep women near the home, for there is less conflict between working hours and household tasks. But informal employment is far less secure an employer than the formal workplace and productivity is often low.

Incomes may be lower in the informal sector for several reasons. One is the absence or high cost of credit. Another is lack of government support. A third is exploitation by larger firms controlling raw materials or markets. And although women's participation in the informal sector is increasing, the returns are declining. Studies show that there is greater difference in the earnings of men and women in the informal sector than in the formal. Women in the informal sector are vulnerable to even slight deteriorations in an economy. Especially in highly indebted countries, informal sector returns have fallen even more than formal sector returns, as more people are pushed into the informal sector. Despite the meagre earnings, the informal sector has been women's only recourse for surviving the economic crises in Africa and Latin America during the 1980s.

3 Chief Executives of the Business Week 1000: A Directory (19 October, 1989) Business Week.

Public life and leadership

Women are poorly represented in the ranks of power, policy and decision-making. Women make up less than 5% of the world's heads of State, heads of major corporations and top positions in international organisations. Women are not just behind in political and managerial equity, they are a long way behind. This is in spite of the fact that women are found in large numbers in low-level positions of public administrations, political parties, trade unions and businesses.

The picture barely improves at other decision-making levels. Fifty United Nations' Member States have no woman in any of their top echelons of government. Although women have made some incursions in the past 20 years in parliaments and at middle management levels, their representation in these areas still averages less than 10% and less than 20% respectively. Their parliamentary representation would have to increase by 35 to 50 percentage points to reach parity with men. The eastern European and USSR parliaments are exceptions. Women have made up about a fourth of the parliamentary bodies there and played an important role. But recent elections show a significant drop in women's representation in these countries, just as parliaments – as a result of political changes – have become more important.

Women continue to be denied equal access to high-status and high-paying positions but there has been some progress since the United Nations Decade for Women began in 1976. Many countries have set up special offices to review complaints of discriminatory practice in political parties, parliaments, unions and professional organisations. Israel, Venezuela and several European countries have quotas to guarantee women more equal participation in the leadership of political parties. Trade unions in Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom have reserved a designated percentage of political seats for women. Women are also defining their own paths in politics. Increasing numbers are entering political life through nongovernmental organisations, women's movements and associations of professional women. And women are increasingly active in the politics of their communities and locales.

Community and grass roots participation have long been an extension of women's traditional place in the community and responsibility for the health and well-being of their families. The past 20 years have seen a burgeoning of groups headed by or heavily made up of women. Discriminatory practices, increasing poverty, violence against women, environmental threats, military build-ups, family and economic imperatives and the negative consequences of economic adjustment and stabilisation programmes have all increased women's needs to band together to change conditions or policies. Women in both the developed and the developing regions have discovered that they can translate their efforts to protect themselves into effective political action.

Demands for equal status

International efforts to establish the rights of women culminated in 1979 with the General Assembly's adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Convention confronts stereotypes, customs and norms that give rise to the many legal, political and economic constraints on women. The legal status of women receives the broadest attention – for basic rights of political participation, civil rights and reproductive rights. One hundred and two countries have ratified the Convention, legally binding themselves to incorporate the Convention's demands in their policies.

In 1985 the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were approved by 157 countries gathered to assess the achievements and failures

of the United Nations Decade for Women. The Strategies demand that governments:

- Play key roles in ensuring that both men and women enjoy equal rights in such areas as education, training and employment.
- Act to remove negative stereotypes and perceptions of women.
- Disseminate information to women about their rights and entitlements.
- Collect timely and accurate statistics on women and monitor their situation.
- Encourage the sharing and support of domestic responsibilities.

Even with progress in legislation, women – especially poor women – are still a long way from receiving social recognition for what they do. *De facto* discrimination on the grounds of sex is insidious but widespread. For example, the Bangladesh Constitution guarantees the equal rights of men and women and sanctions affirmative action programmes in favour of women but as the data reveals the status of women in Bangladesh is among the lowest in the world. It is encouraging, then, that policy makers there have stepped up efforts to implement programmes for women, particularly in health and education.

Many societies deny women independence from family and male control, particularly where girls are married at a very young age to much older men. According to estimates from the World Fertility Survey, almost half the women in Africa, 40% in Asia and 30% in Latin America are married by the age of 18. Men are on average four to eight years older. And a woman's social status is often linked entirely to her reproductive role. Failure to bear children – or even to bear sons – is cause of ostracism, divorce and even brutality in areas of Africa and southern Asia.

The Nairobi Strategies restate demands in the 1957 and 1962 international conventions for equal status of women and men in marriage and in the dissolution of marriage. In addition to such reforms in marriage laws and practices, efforts to improve women's economic status and autonomy – to reflect their economic responsibilities and contributions – can bring them closer to an equal footing with men in and out of the household.⁴

OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN IN 1995⁵

Issues of gender equality are moving to the top of the global agenda but better understanding of women's and men's contributions to society is essential to speed the shift from agenda to policy to practice. Too often, women and men live in different worlds, worlds that differ in access to education and work opportunities, and in health, personal security and leisure time. *The World's Women, 1995*, provides information and analyses to highlight the economic, political and social differences that still separate women's and men's lives and how these differences are changing.

How different are these worlds? Anecdote and misperception abound, in large part because good information has been lacking. As a result, policy has been ill-informed, strategy unfounded and practice unquestioned. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. It is changing because advocates of women's interests have

4 *The World's Women, 1970–90* (HMSO, 1991), pp 1–6.

5 *United Nations Report* (HMSO, 1995).