

# **Women's Work in South Asia : A Situational Analysis and Policy Concerns**

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## PREFACE

Gender inequalities are pervasive in the labour markets of South Asia. The socially subordinate position of women translates into distinct disadvantages in the labour market even though constitutional provisions and legislations often accord equal status to men and women both in the labour market and in society in general. Women's reproductive and domestic responsibilities hamper their participation in the labour market. Women workers face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment, are largely confined to low-productivity activities and earn lower incomes than men from similar occupations.

This study empirically reviews these features of women's employment in the context of five major countries of South Asia. This review, while confirming the pervasive existence of gender inequalities, also shows that there are forces at work which are changing the work environment of women. Economic reforms, technological changes, migration processes and demographic changes - all affect women's position in the labour market. Unfortunately, not all the changes have been favourable to women workers. The market-oriented economic reforms, for example, do not seem to have had favourable consequences for women's employment. Declining fertility rates, on the other hand, improve conditions of women's participation in the labour market.

The study goes on to review policies and programmes designed to improve conditions of women's employment, implemented in the countries concerned. It finds that an impressive array of programmes and policies had indeed been implemented in these countries by both national governments and civil society organizations. What is surprising is that actual conditions of women's work have changed so little. The study suggests that the reasons lie in inappropriate designs of some of the programmes and policies, uncoordinated and ineffective implementation and a general failure to substantially alter the socio-cultural context. On the basis of these reviews and analysis, the study presents a set of recommendations for future policies and programmes.

The facts, analysis and recommendations should stimulate healthy debates among all those concerned with eliminating gender inequalities in the labour market.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Issues

The World Summit on Social Development recognized that 'full and ..... adequately remunerated employment' is a potent instrument for alleviating poverty and promoting social integration.<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that paid employment for women facilitates the recognition of women's true contribution to economy and society. It raises women's self-esteem, legitimises their position in household decision-making, and helps reduce discrimination. Paid employment, if properly conceived and adequately compensated, can be empowering.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true of South Asia, which is fast emerging as one of the poorest and least gender-sensitive regions in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Two dominant characteristics of the work environment for women in South Asia are a state of endemic poverty on the one hand and deep-seated gender bias on the other.

South Asia has the largest concentration of poor people in the world. Though the region accounted for 22 per cent of the world's population in 1995, it commanded only 1.3 per cent of global income. The adult literacy rate stands at 48 per cent as compared to 96 per cent in the East Asian region. There are high levels of infant and child mortality and poor access to safe drinking water, sanitation and primary health care.

In addition, the population of South Asia is likely to go up by at least two percentage points in the next 25 years. Given the low rates of public investment in human resources in the region, there is the serious danger of an intensification of excess supply conditions in the labour market in the countries of the region.<sup>4</sup>

Gender is one of the major determinants of familial roles and responsibilities in South Asia. Discrimination starts early in life, leading to girl children and young women in families getting less care, less nutrition and less education than their male counterparts. Saddled with the responsibility of home management and family survival, women from poverty stricken households

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 48, Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> For an incisive analysis of the potential of paid employment for enhancing the bargaining position of women in a situation of cooperative conflict within the family, see Sen (1985). Sen argues that access to outside earnings endows women with greater bargaining power within the cooperative structures of household arrangements by bolstering women's 'fallback position' in case the arrangement breaks down, and by reducing the potency of 'threat' by the stronger partner in the game, the husband in case of a married couple, to walk out of the collusive arrangement.

<sup>3</sup> See Mahbub-ul-Huq (1997) for a comparative analysis of various dimensions of economic deprivation and gender bias in South Asian countries.

<sup>4</sup> See Mahbub ul Haq (1997), Chapter 1.

take on any work, at home or outside, that would help households survive. Given their relatively deprived human capital endowments and low reservation wages, a large majority of women in the labour force are exposed to the risk of exploitation. The social seclusion of women such as that embodied in the system of 'purdah', reinforces gender-based discrimination in the labour market.

Culture, tradition and religion are important determinants of work patterns in South Asia. While this is true for both men and women, the influence of these forces on women is far stronger. Socialization of gender roles starts very early in South Asian cultures as is evident from the distinctive time-use patterns of young girls and boys. While girls are taught domestic skills from a very young age, boys are not. Much of South Asian society, especially India, Nepal and to a certain extent Sri Lanka, is also ridden by caste hierarchies.

Interpretations of religious texts have varied widely under different cultural and religious regimes, with strong implications for women's status and gender roles in society. Independent of what the two dominant religions of the region - Hinduism and Islam - prescribe with regard to equality of all living beings, in practice religion as a social force has accorded a secondary status for women.

Since managing the domestic sphere is primarily women's responsibility, women's labour market involvement in most societies is conditioned by the demographic structure of the household. This is very much the case in South Asia. However, an objective assessment of the real situation is made difficult by contextual as well as conceptual complications.

By all accounts, women of South Asia put in long hours of 'work' - longer by far on an average than men do. But large proportions of their labouring activities are not recorded as economically productive work, either because they are of a purely 'domestic' nature, or because they are mistakenly perceived as extensions of domestic work, located as they are within the household or in the farm sector. Women's opportunities are limited to a narrow range of 'feminine jobs' which are usually paid less and generally lack security and are generally valued less than traditionally male occupations. As a result, even the economically productive activities of women are often not recorded as productive work in official data gathering systems.

Barring these problems of data on women's work, there is another dimension to women's involvement in paid economic activities in South Asia which merits attention. The recorded female labour force participation rates (FLFPRs), when plotted against household incomes, have a marked U-shaped form, suggesting that as households move up the income scale, women drop out of the labour force. Withdrawal of women from paid employment is seen as a status symbol in groups aspiring for upward social mobility. This is typically a South Asian phenomenon, with a strong cultural flavour to it.

The practice of 'purdah' or female seclusion is observed by large sections of the population in almost all the religions in the sub-continent. It is most prominent in the Muslim population, with strong implications for women's labour supply behaviour in Pakistan, and among large sections of Muslims in India and Bangladesh. However, it is interesting to note that even though Bangladesh and Pakistan share the same dominant religion of Islam, because of cultural factors, the practice of 'purdah' is somewhat less stringent in Bangladesh. The process of structural reforms in

Bangladesh has been associated with large increases in employment of women workers in export garment industries.<sup>5</sup> No such signs are visible in Pakistan, although the reforms process is very much in place in that country.

The South Asian region differs from some other regions in terms of the pattern of female labour supply. Since a large majority of the recorded female workforce in South Asia is poor, women cannot afford to withdraw from the labour force during their reproductive years. Since most of them work in the farm sector, where work arrangements are more flexible than, for instance, in factory work, it is possible for them to continue working, along with carrying out their domestic responsibilities. The data on age-specific female participation rates from South Asia, therefore, do not suggest much withdrawal from the workforce during their reproductive years, as has been observed in some other parts of the world. The solitary exception to this pattern is Sri Lanka, with its qualitatively different, more literate female labour force. A single peaked function, much like what is observed for literate women in other South Asian countries as well is observed here. But the majority of South Asian women continue to be engaged in productive work all through the reproductive years. Thus social, cultural and religious influences interact with demographic and economic factors to determine the nature and extent of women's employment in South Asia.

## **1.2 Social and Economic Development in South Asia**

Both in terms of economic growth as well as social development, the South Asian region lags way behind not merely the industrial world but also most other developing countries. GNP per capita in the five countries under review has been below the average GNP per capita in the developing world. As a percentage of the GNP per capita for the developing countries as a whole, it ranges from less than 20 per cent for Nepal to about 60 per cent in Sri Lanka. When compared with GNP per capita in the industrial countries, the divergence is much higher. Even when one corrects for purchasing power parity, the differences continue to be striking, as can be seen from Table 1.1.

All countries in this region, with the notable exception of Sri Lanka, lag behind industrial and other developing countries, in terms of most indicators of social development (Table 1.2). Commitment of government resources to social development has been very poor. Education and health expenditure as a percentage of GNP in these countries is deplorably low.

Statistics on gender disparity in these countries are also striking. Table 1.3 gives an overall view of gender parity in the region in terms of certain standard indicators. All over the world, life expectancy of females is higher than that of males by 6 to 8 percentage points. Not so in South Asia, with the exception of Sri Lanka. In Nepal, it continues to be less than 100. In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, the figure has just about crossed the 100 mark. Although there is a steady rise in gender parity in the region in terms of life expectancy at birth over the last two to three decades, the rise has been relatively slow. Much of the disparity can be explained by the deprivation in nutrition and healthcare that women are subjected to right from birth in South Asian society. This is exacerbated by high rates of maternal mortality. Again, the sole exception to

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<sup>5</sup> It may be noted though that this has not necessarily led to revoking the practice of seclusion in many cases.



Table 1.1: Development Indicators for South Asian Countries - Developing and Industrial (mid-nineties)

Indicators	Bangladesh		India		Nepal		Pakistan		Sri Lanka		South Asia		Developing Countries		Industrial Countries		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
GNP per capita (US\$)	220	300	190	430	600	309	970	16394									
Real GDP per capita (PPP\$)	1,290	1,240	1,000	2,160	3,030	1,370	2,696	15136									
Expenditure (as % of GNP)																	
Education	2.3	3.7	2.9	2.7	3.7	3.4	3.9	5.4									
Health	1.4	1.3	2.2	1.8	1.8	1.4	2	N.A.									
Defence (as % of GDP)	1.5	3.6	1.1	7	4.7	3.8	4.4	3.1									
Military / Social Spending Ratio (%)	41	65	35	125	107	72	60	33									

Source : Human Development in South Asia, 1997.

Table 1.2 : Demographic, Socio-Economic and other Related Indicators for South Asian Countries, 1994

Indicators	Bangladesh		India		Nepal		Pakistan		Sri Lanka		South Asia	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Life Expectancy	56.3	56.5	61.1	61.4	55.8	54.9	61.3	63.3	70	74.6	60.7	61.2
Adult Literacy	48.4	24.3	64.5	36.1	39.7	12.8	49	23.3	93.2	86.9	61.6	34.3
Total Fertility Rate (1996)	—	3.2	—	3.2	—	5.1	—	5.2	—	2.1	—	3.5
Maternal Mortality	—	850	—	570	—	1500	—	340	—	140	—	610
Combined Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)	45	34	63	47	68	42	50	25	65	68	59.6	43.2
Earned Income Share	76.9	23.1	74.3 a	25.7	67.0 a	33	79.2 a	20.8	65.5	34.5	74.8	25.3
Seats held in Parliament (%) <sup>b</sup>	90.9	9.1	—	7.3	—	—	—	3.4	—	5.3	—	6.9
Administrators & Managers (%) <sup>c</sup>	94.9	5.1	97.7	2.3	—	—	96.6	3.4	83.1	16.9	97.1	2.9
Professional & Technical Workers (%) <sup>c</sup>	76.9	23.1	79.5	20.5	—	—	79.9	20.1	75.5	24.5	78.7	21.3
GDI Rank	128	118	131	120	70	70	—	—	—	—	—	—
GEM Rank	76	86	—	92	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Source : Human Development in South Asia, 1997; and The State of The World's Children, UNICEF 1998.

<sup>a</sup> Estimated on a pro - rata basis <sup>b</sup> As of 1 January, 1997 <sup>c</sup> As of latest available years

Table 1.3 : Gender Parity Indicators

(Male : 100)

Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Life Expectancy (1996)	100	100	98	103	106
Adult Literacy (1995)	52	56	33	47	92
Years of Schooling (1993)	29	34	31 <sup>1</sup>	24 <sup>1</sup>	79
Primary Enrolment (1990-5)	87	81 <sup>1</sup>	68 <sup>1</sup>	45 <sup>1</sup>	98 <sup>1</sup>
Combined Enrolment (1993)	76	73	61	49	102
Labour Force (1993)	72	47	67	39 <sup>2</sup>	56
Earned Income Share (1993)	30	33 <sup>1</sup>	47 <sup>1</sup>	23	49
Economic Activity Rate (1993)	73	34	48	16	36
Administrators & Managers (1993)	5	2 <sup>1</sup>	9 <sup>1</sup>	3 <sup>1</sup>	17 <sup>1</sup>
Share in Parliament (1993)	11 <sup>2</sup>	8 <sup>3</sup>	3 <sup>2</sup>	2 <sup>2</sup>	5 <sup>2</sup>

Source : *Human Development in South Asia, 1997*; and *State of the World's Children, UNICEF 1998*.

<sup>1</sup> Figures based on 1992 data

<sup>2</sup> Figures based on 1994 data

<sup>3</sup> Figures based on 1996 data

the general picture is Sri Lanka.<sup>6</sup>

Information on gender parity of educational indicators such as adult literacy, years of schooling, primary enrolment ratios, and combined enrolment ratios in the five countries of the region shows that gender parity in adult literacy ranged between 33 in Nepal to about 56 in India, with a high of 92 in Sri Lanka. What is more disturbing is that gender parity in children's education continues to lag behind full parity in these countries. In Pakistan, primary enrolment for girl children was barely 60 per cent of primary enrolment for boys in 1992. The corresponding combined enrolment ratio was only 79 per cent. Similarly, the parity in years of schooling for girl children in the region, barring Sri Lanka, varied between 24 in Pakistan to 34 in India.

A partial fall-out of this discrepancy in educational attainments is seen in the low rates of absorption of women in the higher rungs of the labour force in these countries. Female labour force participation rates are consistently low, especially if the 'usual' and not the 'extended' definition of employment is used. Despite the fact that women's primary responsibility is perceived to be in the reproductive sphere, the low recorded percentage of women in the labour force in these countries is a matter of concern.

Women's share in earned income is also very low - consistently below the corresponding share of women in the labour force, in some cases like Bangladesh, by a factor of two. This suggests that much of women's productive activities in these economies are carried out in the form of either unpaid family labour or in relatively low-income wage and self-employment activities. It is a matter of concern that even in Sri Lanka, where the combined enrolment of women exceeds the parity by 2 percentage points, women constitute only 56 per cent of the labour force of the economy and command even a lower share, i.e., 49 per cent of total income. The occupational

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of a number of other basic indicators of the economic and social well-being of the population in the region, see *World Development Report of the World Bank*, various issues.

distribution of women in these countries reflects a low percentage of women in administrative or managerial positions. The political invisibility of women can be gauged from the single digit representation of women in the respective national parliaments, although women constitute half the electorate. The only exception is Bangladesh, where 11 per cent of the elected members of Parliament are women. This, however may be a result of the statutory quota for women in Parliament rather than a reflection of an autonomous trend.

## CHAPTER 2

# PATTERNS OF WOMENS EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

### 2.1 Statistical Invisibility of Women's Work

Agriculture continues to be the primary source of sustenance for the majority of the population in South Asia and much of agriculture is dominated by small and marginal owner-operated farms. Women's work in the agricultural sector is carried out as an extension of home-based production activities or as unpaid family labour. Thus, women remain 'invisible' and outside the scope of official data gathering structures. A number of domestic activities that women regularly perform in these economies, such as maintenance of kitchen gardens, collection of food, fuel and firewood, home processing of food products such as husking of paddy and grinding of foodgrains, home-based economic activities such as making of baskets, sewing, tailoring, etc. and collection of water for drinking and other purposes, are activities which are deemed to be economically productive as per the labour standards of the International Labour Organization.<sup>7</sup> But more often than not, these are not captured in official statistical accounts. Micro studies in several South Asian countries have shown that if such activities could be properly recorded, the number of hours of productive work for women on an average would go up substantially and in most cases, be higher than that of men.<sup>8</sup> Table 2.1 compiled from micro studies done in the 1970s and 1980s in Nepal, Bangladesh and India clearly shows that this is indeed the case.

**Table 2.1 : Labour Time Allocation of Rural Adult Men and Women in Different Regions and Countries of South Asia (Hours Per Day Per Activity)**

Activity	Sex	Northern India	Southern India	Western India	Eastern India	Bangladesh			Nepal
Direct economic activity	F	4.19	5.40	6.70	2.33	1.80	2.90	1.35	6.78
	M	6.62	7.55	NA	6.92	8.00	7.85	6.25	6.72
Expenditure saving or income generating domestic activity	F	4.65	3.60	2.68	5.51	7.50	5.40	8.18	4.03
	M	0.53	0.20	NA	0.21	1.10	1.28	3.22	0.79
Total	F	8.84	9.00	9.38	7.54	9.30	8.30	9.53	10.81
	M	7.15	7.75	NA	7.13	9.10	8.83	9.47	7.51

N. A. : Not Available

Source : Acharya and Shah (1989).

<sup>7</sup> These activities are also deemed to be economically productive under the definition of productive work as spelt out in the System of National Accounts, United Nations 1993.

<sup>8</sup> If one includes the hours that women spend on purely domestic work, which is almost wholly done by them, it is clear why a woman's work is never 'done' in rural South Asia (see the quotation cited at the beginning of Chapter 1).

All South Asian countries, with the exception of Nepal, have recently revised the official definition of "work" in line with international standards, in order to capture women's unpaid and/or "invisible" productive economic activities within the recorded statistical data systems. The efforts of India and Bangladesh to capture women's economically productive activities are reflected in the better quality of data emanating from these countries over time.

## **2.2 Data Sources**

### **2.2.1 Bangladesh**

The major source of data on women's work are the Labour Force Surveys. The latest data from this source pertains to 1995-96. Other sources include the Population Censuses and publications of various Ministries and Departments of the Government of Bangladesh, especially the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

The Labour Force Surveys of Bangladesh provide information on activity status, distribution of the workforce across occupational and industrial categories, labour status of the worker, hours worked, unemployment, and earnings/wages. Labour force is defined as the economically active population aged ten years and above. The reference period of the survey relates to the week preceding the day of the survey.<sup>9</sup>

From 1989, the Labour Force Surveys of Bangladesh have generated data on employment and unemployment using an extended definition which corresponds to the United Nations System of National Accounts (SNA) specification of employment in so far as it includes unpaid work in family farms and own-account enterprises. Prior to this, the Labour Force Surveys collected data using only the 'usual' definition. The practice of using the 'extended' definition has resulted in higher estimates of the female labour force. Thus in 1995-96, the size of the female labour force in Bangladesh by the 'usual' definition was estimated at 7,151,000. The corresponding estimate by the 'extended' definition was of the order of 20,831,000 - a three-fold or 300 per cent increase. In comparison, the difference in the two estimates for the male labour force is less than two percentage points. The dramatic rise in estimates of female labour force participation in Bangladesh in the post-1989 period can be almost wholly explained by the inclusion of unpaid family labour of women under the category of 'economically productive labour'.

### **2.2.2 India**

The two major sources of countrywide data on women's work are the decennial Population Censuses and the quinquennial Employment and Unemployment Surveys of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). The NSSO has carried out detailed surveys on the employment scenario once every five years since 1972-73. Aside from these, sex-disaggregated data on employment and related issues can be obtained from the *Economic Census* (the latest having been carried out in

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<sup>9</sup> An employed person is one who has worked for one or more hours in the reference period for pay or profit, or without pay in a family farm or enterprise, or is temporarily absent from a job or business that he or she generally works in during the reference period. The 'refined' activity rate or the Labour Force Participation Rate is the ratio of the number of economically active persons to the population in the respective age group. The corresponding crude activity rate would have the total population in the denominator.

1990), various publications of the Ministry of Labour, and the Office of the Director General of Employment and Training, the Labour Bureau, the Central Statistical Organization and the Department of Women and Child Development among others.

The data on India in this study primarily relate to the five quinquennial surveys on employment and unemployment carried out by the NSSO in the early 1970s. These surveys have broadly used the same definitions to ensure intertemporal comparability. Surveys pertain to the years 1972-73 (27th round), 1977-78 (32nd round), 1983 (38th round), 1987-88 (43rd round), and 1993-94 (50th round). The NSS defines employment by three different criteria, i.e., Usual Status (US, i.e. the reference period one year prior to the date of survey), Current Weekly Status (CWS, i.e. the reference period one week prior to the date of survey), and Current Daily Status (CDS, i.e. the reference period each half-day of the seven days preceding the date of survey). It also distinguishes between Principal Status (PS) and Subsidiary Status (SS) workers depending on whether or not the person concerned has been in the labour force for more than 50 per cent of the time.

A corresponding set of estimates for most labour force related information, excepting information on earnings and employment status, can be obtained from the decennial Population Census of India. However, because the NSS data on women's employment is qualitatively more inclusive than the corresponding Census data, most of the data pertaining to employment in India in this study has been taken from the NSS quinquennial surveys rather than the Population Census.

### **2.2.3 Nepal**

Nepal has had no comprehensive Labour Force Survey to date and Population Census data have some serious limitations.<sup>10</sup>

The major source of data on the labour force in Nepal presented in this study relates to Population Census estimates of 1971, 1981 and 1991. The data pertain to population aged ten years and above. Economically active persons are defined as those who had worked for at least eight months in a year, either at a single stretch or at intervals, for pay, profit or remuneration in cash or kind during the year preceding the day of the Census enumeration. In the 1991 Census, a person who has worked for any length of time during the 12 months preceding the Census day has been treated as economically active. The 1991 Census data, therefore, also gives information on the extent of underemployment in the country.

Some information on labour force participation is also available from a Labour Force Survey which was carried out by the Central Department of Population Studies of Tribhuvan University in 1996. The major reference for this section is the Population Monograph for Nepal, 1995.

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<sup>10</sup> See ILO (1996), ILO (1997), and Population Monograph of Nepal, Planning Commission of Nepal, for a review of the situation in this respect. A Labour Force Survey is currently underway in Nepal in which the Central Bureau of Statistics and UNDP are involved. Smaller surveys such as the World Bank Living Standards Measurement Survey of 1996 or the Demographic Survey of 1994 have been used to get labour market information for this study.

#### 2.2.4 Pakistan

Pakistan has had no Population Census since 1981. The main source of data on women's employment is the Labour Force Survey, although much of the published information from the LFS is not gender-disaggregated. The Federal Bureau of Statistics of the Government of Pakistan has been conducting these Labour Force Sample Surveys on a quarterly basis, covering both the rural and urban population of Pakistan from 1963-64 onwards. The survey was suspended in some interim years for various reasons, but a reasonably long time series can be obtained on an annual basis from this data set. The latest year for which data are available is 1994-95.

Since 1990-91, the Labour Force Surveys of Pakistan have been based on a questionnaire revised in the light of the ILO recommendations of 1982, when additional probing questions for capturing the extent of employment and female participation in economic activities were added. A comparative analysis of old and new definitions of labour force concepts shows that in the new definitions, concepts such as employment and unemployment have been spelt out in more unambiguous ways. Although technically the old definition did include unpaid female workers as workers, under the new definition this is spelt out to specifically include "all work in wage or self employment for profit or family gain, in cash or in kind"<sup>11</sup>. Thus, data on women's participation in Pakistan's workforce, which is often in the form of unpaid family labour, is likely to be more accurate in the post 1991 Labour Force Survey estimates than in the earlier years. However, estimates appear to be somewhat unstable across the years.<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.2.5 Sri Lanka

The major source of data on employment of women in Sri Lanka is the Census of Population carried out in 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971 and 1981. The Census of 1991 was postponed due to the conflict in North and East Sri Lanka.

Other sources of data are the Labour Force Surveys and Socio-economic Surveys of 1981 and 1985-86. Quarterly Labour Force Surveys have been conducted in the country since 1990. Until the first quarter of 1996, the whole island was covered by these surveys.

Information on women's economic activities can also be obtained from the Survey of Household Economic Activities of 1984-85, Annual Surveys of Manufacturing Industries, Household Incomes and Expenditure Surveys, 1991-92 (excluding data from the North and East), and the Demographic Survey of 1994-95 (excluding data from the North and East). Apart from these, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka had conducted Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Surveys in 1973-78 and 1986-87. The Department of Labour also conducts Annual Surveys on employment.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Fifty Years of Pakistan In Statistics*, Vol. IV, pp. 772-73, Federal Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan.

<sup>12</sup> This feature of the Pakistan Labour Force Survey data must be kept in mind while interpreting data. Also, the recorded work participation of women in the labour force is so low that very often government publications fail to provide gender-disaggregated estimates. The four volumes of *Fifty Years of Pakistan in Statistics* have hardly any gender breakdown of the information supplied.

The limitations of data from Sri Lanka are to some extent also common to other countries. These are:

- ◆ non-comparability of data over time due to differences in definitions and areas covered, and
- ◆ exclusion of various categories of women workers who work as unpaid family labour.

Apart from these, in the case of Sri Lanka, conflicts in the northern and eastern parts of the country have prevented data collection operations in these regions - as has been the case in some parts of northern and north-eastern India as well (CENWOR, 1997).

## **2.3 Women in the Labour Market**

The following sections examine the broad patterns and trends in women's labour force participation and employment as derived from the official estimates of the five countries. The data sets for all countries have been processed such as to facilitate inter-country comparisons. The data are taken from the Labour Force Surveys carried out in these countries, except for Nepal where Population Census data are reported. All information on labour force relates to the population aged ten years and above. Also, to the extent possible, it is the extended definition of labour force, as suggested by the ILO Standards of 1982 and the SNA specifications of 1993, that has been used. In other words, in principle, unpaid family labour in economically productive work has been included in the definition of labour force.

### **2.3.1 Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPRs)**

A slow but steady increase in LFPRs among women is evident from Table 2.2. It is interesting to see that the corresponding rates for males show a steady decline in almost all countries of the region, with the exception of India. This may be explained by the fact that the data presented here relate to the population ten years and above. With a relatively faster increase in the school enrolment of boys as compared to girls over time, there is a slower induction of young boys into the labour force.

Also, all the countries under review have specific labour force structures, labour use patterns, as well as the data which can be invoked to explain these. In Bangladesh, for instance, a steady rise in female LFPRs using the usual definition, and a steady fall in female LFPRs using the extended definition suggests a structural change in the female work participation patterns such that, more young women are seen entering regular employment rather than being absorbed in subsidiary types of employment in farms and household production. It is notable that the period under review is also the period when there has been a massive increase in the employment of young Bangladeshi women in conventional wage employment in the small scale sector such as textiles and garment manufacturing for exports.

Similarly in Nepal, a steadily rising participation rate by women over the last 20 years suggests a greater involvement of women workers in visible employment. The LFPRs for female workers in India, as noted above, pertains to NSS estimates which exclude Code 93 activities (activities such as maintaining a kitchen garden, collecting fish and firewood, tending cattle, etc.). Data for these activities, were for the first time, collected and tabulated in the NSS 32nd round. To the extent the incidence of these activities has remained unchanged over time, the inclusion of Code 93 in LFPR estimates is likely to raise these estimated rates by a certain fixed percentage over the years. The data do not clearly suggest any significant trends in LFPRs in India.



Table 2.2 : Labour Force Participation Rates by Sex in South Asia

Year	Male	Female	All	All figures relate to the age group 10 years and above.
<b>BANGLADESH</b>				
<b>Usual Definition</b>				<b>Bangladesh</b>
1989	81.0	10.6	47.0	<u>Notes</u>
1990-91	79.6	14.1	48.8	Based on extended labour force definition.
1995-96	77.0	18.1	48.3	<u>Source</u>
<b>Extended Definition</b>				<i>Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh</i>
1989	81.0	61.6	71.6	1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, December 1996.
1990-91	79.6	58.2	69.6	
1995-96	78.3	50.6	64.8	<b>India</b>
<b>INDIA</b>				<u>Notes</u>
1972-73	54.2	27.9	42.0	Figures relate to usually working according to both principal and subsidiary status.
1977-78	56.0	31.0	44.0	Figures relate to usual status of individuals. Labour force covers those involved in gainful activity regularly and occasionally along with those unemployed. The LFPR represent the size of labour force as per cent of population. All India figures have been derived using the following sources.
1983	55.1	29.9	43.0	
1987-88	54.5	28.8	42.0	
1993-94	55.6	28.7	42.6	<u>Source</u>
<b>NEPAL</b>				<i>Employment and Unemployment in India, National Sample Survey Organisation 1993-94, Department of Statistics, Government of India, March 1997.</i>
1971	82.9	35.1	59.3	
1981	83.1	46.2	65.1	
1991	68.7	45.3	56.9	<b>Nepal</b>
<b>PAKISTAN</b>				<u>Note</u>
1971-72	78.7	8.1	45.2	In the 1971 and 1981 census for defining economically active population the minimum length of time period of work was at least eight months of the preceding year, whereas for the 1991 census it was any length of time
1974-75	67.7	6.4	43.8	<u>Source</u>
1978-79	77.3	11.8	46.1	<i>Population Monograph of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, His Majesty's Government, 1995; Employment in Nepal : Prospects and Policies. ILO, South Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (SAAT), New Delhi 1997.</i>
1982-83	75.2	10.3	44.4	
1984-85	77.1	8.7	44.2	
1985-86	74.8	9.1	43.4	
1986-87	73.5	11.9	44.0	
1987-88	73.8	10.2	43.2	
1990-91	71.3	12.8	43.2	
1991-92	70.3	14.0	42.9	
1992-93	69.2	13.2	42.3	<b>Pakistan</b>
<b>SRI LANKA</b>				<u>Note</u>
1946	76.1	24.8	52.4	—
1953	73.0	26.9	51.6	<u>Source</u>
1963	69.2	20.0	45.9	<i>Economic Survey 1995-96, Government of Pakistan, Finance Division, Economic Advisor's Wing, Islamabad.</i>
1971	68.4	26.0	48.0	
1981	65.4	22.5	44.4	
1985/86	68.6	32.5	50.3	<b>Sri Lanka</b>
1990	67.4	39.4	53.3	<u>Note</u>
* 1994	68.6	28.9	48.5	* Excludes North and East.
* 1996	66.1	30.7	48.5	<u>Source</u>
				<i>Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December 1997.</i>

However, it must be kept in mind that even reliable NSS figures can be improved upon to better reflect women's involvement in the labour force in India by further processing NSS data after including women's productive activities categorised under Code 93 of NSS Activity Codes. Code 93 includes a whole range of activities which women normally perform in Indian households and which should be included in calculating women's involvement in productive work according to specifications listed out under the United Nations System of National Accounts of 1993 and the definition of work as suggested by the ILO standards. The current NSS estimates of labour force participation rates of women excludes Code 93. Table 3.3 presents revised estimates of women's LFPRs in India after including Code 93 for two rounds of NSS. It can be seen from this table that the inclusion of Code 93 substantially raises the estimates of female LFPRs.

**Table 2.3 : Alternative Estimates of Workforce Participation Rates (WFPR) in India, 1987-88 and 1993-94**

Activity Code/ Distribution	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>1. WFPR I</b>				
Percentage covered under activity codes 11-51				
1987-88	24.5	51.7	11.8	49.6
1993-94	23.4	53.8	12.1	57.3
<b>2. Percentage covered under activity code 93</b>				
1987-88	15.3	0.3	9.8	0.1
1993-94	19.4	0.2	10.0	0.1
<b>3. WFPR II (1+2)</b>				
1987-88	39.8	52.0	21.6	49.7
1993-94	42.8	54.0	22.1	57.4

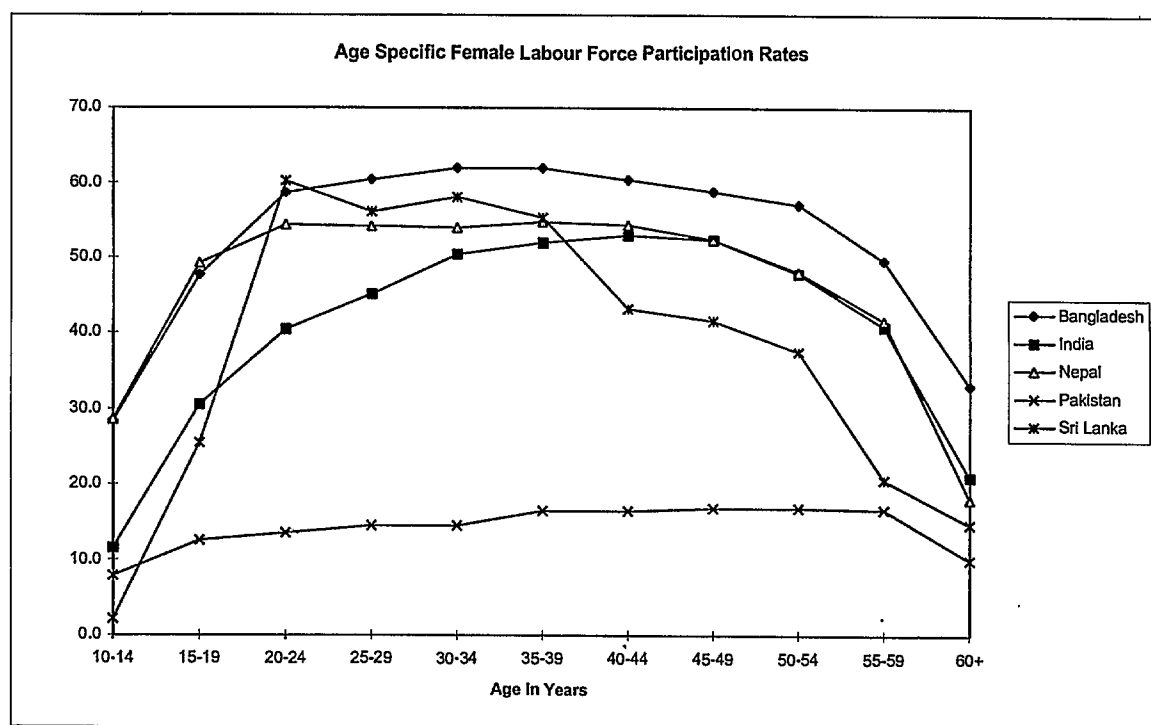
Source : Figures for the years 1987-88 are taken from Suryanarayanan (1996). Figures for 1993-94 have been calculated on the basis of Table 2A (set I), p-8; and Table 298, pp A-97, A-98, A-100 and A-101, *Employment and Unemployment in India*, NSSO 1993-94, Government of India, March, 1997.

Notes : All rates pertain to Usual Principal Status categories. Activity Codes 11-51 relate to activities covered under the conventional definition of work. For details, see *Key Results on Employment and Unemployment*, NSS 50th round, Government of India, pp. 3-4. Code 93 includes activities such as maintenance of kitchen garden, free collection of fish, firewood etc., husking of paddy (own produce/acquired), preparation of 'gur', cowdung cakes, etc. For details, see Activity List in Report No. 416: *Participation of India Women in Household Work and Other Specific Activities*, NSS 50th round, Government of India, p. 13.

An interesting feature of the labour force participatory behaviour of females in South Asian countries is the plateau-like shape of age-specific participation rates (see Figure 2.1).

The plateau-like structure suggests continued participation in productive activities throughout the reproductive years - a scenario which is at variance with women's labour market behaviour in some other parts of Asia and in the rest of the world (Horton, 1996). The relatively low elevation of the plateau for most of the countries can be explained by the inadequacies in capturing female labour force participation, making the recorded official rates lower than they should be. Since there is no reason to suppose that such inadequacies will vary across different age groups, one may legitimately presume that if the data were more complete, one would have still observed plateau-like graphs - albeit at somewhat higher levels - closer to similar work participation patterns for male workers in the region.

Figure 2.1 : Age-Specific Labour Force Participation Rates for Women in South Asia



Source : Same as table 2.2

There is no unique explanation for this phenomenon. There is evidence to suggest that women move in and out of the labour force at a higher rate than men. This is seen from the variability in estimates of women's labour force participation rates in India, for instance, depending on the kind of definitions one uses and the length of the reference period, i. e., depending on whether or not one uses the usual status, current weekly status, or current daily status definition. This is not the case for the corresponding male figures. This also suggests a higher incidence of the "discouraged worker effect" and a higher degree of seasonality in women's work participation patterns.

## 2.4 Structure of Employment

### 2.4.1 Labour Status Categories

Percentage distribution of the employed female population aged ten years and above by labour status category shows a marginal decline in own account work (Table 2.4) in all the countries for which data are available. The majority of women workers in India, Nepal and Bangladesh are self-employed. Wage employment engages the large majority of workers in Sri Lanka. The data on Sri Lanka do not segregate regular employees from casual workers within wage employment. So it is difficult to say anything about the extent of casualisation over time of the Sri Lankan female workforce from this data set alone. However, in India where such divisions are available, it is clear that there has been a steady rise in the incidence of casual labour among the wage employed category of female workers.

Table 2.4: Percentage Distribution of Female Workforce by Labour Status Categories in South Asia

Year	Self Employed			Unpaid Family Labour	Employees			Unspecified All
	Employers	Own-Account Workers	Unpaid Family Labour		Regular Employees	Casual Labour	Unspecified All	
<b>BANGLADESH</b>								
1995-96	0.1	7.6	77.4	8.7	6.2	—	100.0	
<b>INDIA</b>								
1972-73	< ———— 63.0 ———— >			6.3	30.7	—	100.0	
1977-78	< ———— 60.6 ———— >			5.3	34.0	—	100.0	
1983	< ———— 60.0 ———— >			5.6	34.5	—	100.0	
1987-88	< ———— 58.9 ———— >			6.9	34.1	—	100.0	
1993-94	< ———— 56.8 ———— >			6.4	36.9	—	100.0	
<b>NEPAL</b>								
1971	0.2	89.0	7.2	3.7	—	—	100.0	
1981	0.4	90.0	4.0	3.9	—	1.8	100.0	
1991	0.4	83.7	3.5	12.0	—	0.5	100.0	
<b>SRI LANKA</b>								
1953	1.3	18.9	12.9	66.9	—	—	100.0	
1963	0.5	8.9	6.7	82.2	—	—	100.0	
1971	0.8	11.2	11.2	76.9	—	—	100.0	
1981	1.2	12.9	6.5	79.4	—	—	100.0	
1985/86	0.9	17.7	23.0	58.4	—	—	100.0	
1990	1.2	18.1	25.1	55.6	—	—	100.0	
* 1994	1.1	16.5	14.6	67.8	—	—	100.0	
* 1996	0.3	16.	18.2	64.6	—	—	100.0	

All figures relate to the age group 10 years and above.

Note: For India, the data is for aggregate self employed, and its break up into categories of self employed is not available.

Notes and Sources: As in Table 2.5.

<u>Countries</u>	<u>Notes</u>	<u>Sources</u>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	● Based on the extended labour force definition.	● <i>Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh, 1995-96</i> , Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, December 1996.
<b>India</b>	● Figures relate to usual status workers, principal and subsidiary.	● <i>Employment and Unemployment in India</i> , National Sample Survey Organization, 1993-94, Department of Statistics, Government of India, March 1997.
<b>Nepal</b>	● In 1971 and 1981 Censuses, for defining economically active population, the minimum length of time period of work was at least eight months of the preceding year, whereas for the 1991 Census, it was any length of time.	● <i>Population Monograph of Nepal</i> , National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, His Majesty's Government, 1995.
<b>Pakistan</b>	● —	● <i>ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics</i> , 54th issue, ILO, Geneva, 1995.
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	● *Excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces.	● <i>Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka</i> , Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December 1997.

## 2.4.2 Broad Industrial Categories

Table 2.5 provides the percentage distribution of employed female population by broad industrial divisions in the five countries over time. It can be seen that a large majority of women in the region continue to work in the primary sector consisting of agriculture, hunting, forestry and fisheries. As per the latest available figures of the recorded female workforce, over 90 per cent in Nepal and between 70 per cent and 80 per cent in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are to be found in the primary sector. The sole exception to this general pattern is Sri Lanka where the 1994 Labour Force Survey shows that the percentage of women engaged in the primary sector has fallen below the 50 per cent mark. It is difficult to say what the figure would have been had the data also covered the North and East which has numerous plantations that engage a large number of women workers.

All countries of the region show a declining trend in the percentage of women workers in the primary sector over the years. However, the rate of decline is very slow. A comparison with the distribution of the male workforce in these countries across broad industrial categories clearly shows a much sharper decline for males over time. This can be gauged from the pattern of women's share in the total workforce in agriculture (Table 2.6). Except in Bangladesh where the percentage has declined from 50.3 per cent in 1991 to 46.8 per cent in 1995-96, in all other countries, the percentage share of women in the agricultural workforce reflects an intensification in feminisation of agriculture over time. For instance, in India, women workers as a percentage of total workers in agriculture rose from 37.6 per cent in 1972-73 to 39.4 per cent in 1993-94. In Pakistan, they rose from 14.3 per cent in 1984-85 to 21.1 per cent in 1993-94. In Sri Lanka, they rose from 27.6 per cent in 1953 to 34.6 per cent in 1990, the latest year for which the data for the entire island country were available. In Nepal, there has been increase of female share in the agricultural workforce, from 35.5 per cent in 1971 to a high of 45 per cent in 1991.

These sets of data suggest a clear pattern of participation of women in agriculture. Although by far the large majority of women workers continue to be in the primary sector of these countries, there has been a modest decline over time in the percentage of women workers engaged in agriculture. However, as male involvement in agriculture has undergone a much more rapid decline over the years, women's share in the agricultural workforce has gone up all over South Asia in recent years, with the possible exception of Bangladesh, which has seen a swelling in the ranks of women workers in personal and other services in the first half of this decade.

Other industrial categories where female workers are to be found in large numbers are manufacturing, trade and other services. Pakistan and Sri Lanka have recorded a relatively large number of women workers in these categories. Especially in Sri Lanka, the increase in the percentage of women employed in manufacturing and the services sector has been quite substantial in recent years. This seems to correspond to the steady fall in the share of women in the agricultural sector. In Pakistan also, the percentage share of women in manufacturing and in the community, social and personal services sector, has hovered between 12 and 15 per cent in recent years. In the 1990s, there seems to be a slowing down of women's induction into the manufacturing sector commensurate with a small but steady corresponding increase in the percentage share of agriculture - perhaps a reflection of the revised definition of women's work

Table 2.5: Percentage Distribution of Female Workforce by Broad Industry Divisions in South Asia

Country / Year	Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry & Fishing	Mining & Quarrying	Manufacturing	Electricity, Gas & Water	Construction	Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotel & Restaurants	Transport Storage & Communication	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	Community Social & Personal Services	Not adequately defined
<b>BANGLADESH</b>										
1990-91	84.9	—	8.6	0.0	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.3	4.3
1995-96	77.5	0.0	7.2	0.1	0.4	2.3	0.2	0.1	8.4	3.8
<b>INDIA</b>										
1972 - 73	84.4	0.2	6.6	—	1.3	2.2	—	5.0	—	—
1977 - 78	81.6	0.2	8.6	—	0.8	2.8	0.2	5.6	—	—
1983	80.7	0.3	8.8	—	1.0	2.8	0.3	5.7	—	—
1987 - 88	77.2	0.5	9.6	—	2.8	3.1	0.2	6.4	—	—
1993 - 94	77.5	0.4	9.4	—	1.4	3.2	0.3	7.9	—	—
<b>NEPAL</b>										
1971	98.2	—	0.5	—	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.8	—
1981	95.8	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	1.9	1.4
1991	90.5	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.1	2.0	0.1	0.1	5.3	0.6
<b>PAKISTAN</b>										
1984-85	75.1	—	11.4	0.1	0.3	1.4	0.3	0.4	10.9	—
1985-86	78.4	—	9.4	—	0.4	1.6	0.4	0.1	9.7	—
1986-87	76.0	—	11.3	0.1	0.3	1.3	—	0.2	10.8	—
1987-88	72.2	0.1	13.3	—	0.8	2.2	0.3	0.4	10.6	0.2
1990-91	66.0	—	13.3	0.1	1.3	3.1	0.6	0.2	15.4	—
1991-92	68.8	0.1	14.3	0.1	0.9	3.4	0.4	0.1	11.9	0.1
1992-93	69.5	—	10.9	0.1	1.0	2.9	0.4	0.1	15.0	0.1
1993-94	72.4	—	9.8	0.1	1.1	2.8	0.6	0.1	13.3	—
<b>SRI LANKA</b>										
1953	60.3	0.2	12.4	0.0	0.4	4.1	0.7	1.1	15.2	5.5
1963	63.5	0.1	9.7	0.0	0.2	3.6	0.4	0.1	18.9	3.5
1971	61.8	0.1	12.2	0.0	0.1	2.9	0.1	0.2	16.2	5.8
1981	52.0	0.3	11.3	0.1	0.6	4.4	1.0	1.0	23.3	6.0
1985/86	54.2	0.6	18.6	0.0	0.6	6.6	0.5	0.9	16.3	1.5
1990	50.5	1.3	20.1	0.1	0.6	5.7	0.7	0.6	20.5	—
* 1994	42.1	0.4	23.8	0.1	0.6	6.0	0.9	1.8	21.6	2.7

All figures relate to age groups 10 years and above.  
Notes and Source same as Table 2.4

Table 2.6: Percentage Share of Female Workforce by Broad Industry Divisions in South Asia

Country / Year	Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry & Fishing	Mining & Quarrying	Manufacturing	Electricity, Gas & Water	Construction	Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotel & Restaurants	Transport Storage & Communication	Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	Community Social & Personal Services	Not adequately defined	
<b>BANGLADESH</b>											
1990-91	50.3	—	28.4	2.5	7.8	2.9	0.7	4.1	13.7	37.3	39.3
1995-96	46.8	4.4	36.7	12.6	7.9	8.1	1.9	7.5	34.3	68.3	38.2
<b>INDIA</b>											
1972-73	37.6	18.9	24.6	—	23.1	14.5	—	21.2	—	—	—
1977-78	38.5	16.7	28.3	—	15.0	15.2	3.2	23.2	—	—	—
1983	40.2	18.9	28.0	—	14.9	15.0	3.6	21.6	—	—	—
1987-88	39.7	20.8	28.3	—	24.9	14.4	2.5	22.2	—	—	—
1993-94	39.4	19.5	28.8	—	13.6	13.8	3.1	24.1	—	—	—
<b>NEPAL</b>											
1971	30.5	0.0	12.6	0.0	3.0	12.1	2.8	4.9	8.0	0.0	0.0
1981	33.1	0.3	14.5	8.7	17.2	15.0	3.1	10.0	14.4	25.1	25.1
1991	45.0	27.0	23.0	7.6	10.7	23.6	4.1	13.0	21.0	16.3	16.3
<b>PAKISTAN</b>											
1984-85	14.3	—	8.0	1.6	0.5	1.2	0.6	4.6	9.5	—	—
1985-86	14.9	—	7.4	—	0.8	1.4	0.9	1.2	9.9	—	—
1986-87	20.4	—	10.7	1.4	0.7	1.4	—	2.7	12.5	—	—
1987-88	16.5	7.0	12.2	—	1.5	2.2	0.6	5.8	10.8	17.1	17.1
1990-91	17.5	—	13.7	1.2	2.4	2.9	1.3	3.3	13.5	14.6	14.6
1991-92	20.5	3.8	16.8	2.0	2.0	3.7	1.0	2.6	18.2	18.2	18.2
1992-93	20.5	—	14.0	1.5	1.9	3.1	1.0	1.9	15.2	8.3	14.0
1993-94	21.1	—	14.4	1.1	2.3	3.1	1.8	1.2	13.8	—	—
<b>SRI LANKA</b>											
1953	27.6	12.7	31.2	5.1	5.7	10.4	5.1	12.2	27.8	20.0	20.0
1963	24.7	10.1	21.6	1.6	1.6	6.8	1.8	5.3	28.0	13.2	13.2
1971	27.4	7.9	29.3	2.6	1.2	6.8	1.9	6.9	26.7	15.1	15.1
1981	23.7	7.4	23.0	6.9	3.9	8.6	4.3	19.6	38.2	13.2	13.2
1985/86	33.2	12.9	44.5	3.1	4.6	20.0	3.2	23.2	40.1	11.2	11.2
1990	34.6	15.2	45.4	7.7	6.4	21.7	5.5	23.5	40.9	—	—
* 1994	29.7	9.2	44.4	6.3	3.9	15.2	5.8	29.8	38.0	18.6	18.6

All figures relate to age groups 10 years and above.  
Notes and Sources: Same as for Table 2.5.

in Pakistan's Labour Force Surveys. The Indian data show a small but steady increase in the percentage share of women in the manufacturing sector, in wholesale and retail trade and the services sector in general. As a percentage of total workforce, women's involvement in these sectors has been stable, if not rising slowly.

Thus, overall it can be said that there has been an intensification of female participation in the workforce in this region, primarily in the agricultural sector, but also to a certain extent in manufacturing (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh), in wholesale and retail trade (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka), and in the services sector (all five countries). Part of this change can be ascribed to feminisation of the overall workforce, and part, to the differential patterns of change in the distribution of employment by industrial categories for men and women workers over time.

### **2.4.3 Occupational Categories**

The distribution of employed females across occupational categories (Table 2.7) and the share of the female workforce as a percentage of the total within different occupational groups across countries and over time (Table 2.8), also suggest a similar pattern. The percentage of women agricultural workers shows a steady increase in most countries, with the possible exception of Bangladesh, over the last six or seven years, although the relative importance of agriculture or animal husbandry as occupational categories has declined among female workers over time. In all countries of the region, there is a slow but steady increase in the incidence of professional/technical and related workers, as there is in the incidence of occupations pertaining to production related work. As a percentage of the total workforce also, there is an increasing incidence of women in professional/technical and related work groups, in service related occupations, and in agriculture and animal husbandry, as there is in production related work. Although the distribution of workers varies between countries, there appears to be a general pattern in these trends. Thus, while a very high and rising percentage of clerical workers in Sri Lanka are women - which is understandable given the high literacy level of the female workforce in Sri Lanka - the incidence of women in the professional and technical occupations in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan has also been going up in recent years. This reflects the rising literacy levels of the female workforce in general and to some extent, the affirmative action taken by governments to employ women in the public sector. It is interesting to note that in India, while the incidence of professional/technical and related workers among women has gone up, there has been a corresponding decline in administrative and managerial occupations.

## **2.5 Unemployment and Underemployment**

Unemployment rates disaggregated by sex suggest that, by and large, female unemployment rates are higher than the corresponding male rates in most countries (Table 2.9). This pattern is very prominent in Sri Lanka, where female unemployment rates are often double the unemployment rates for men, which themselves have been generally two digit figures. In Pakistan until about 1988, recorded female unemployment rates were lower than the corresponding male rates. Since 1991, however, the recorded female unemployment rates are much higher, sometimes more than double the corresponding male rates. It may be noted that since 1991, the LFS in



Table 2.7: Percentage Distribution of the Female Workforce by Major Occupational Categories in South Asia

Year	Professional/ Technical & Related Work	Administrative & Managerial	Clerical	Sales	Service	Agriculture/ Animal Husbandry	Production related work	Workers not Classified	All Divisions
<b>BANGLADESH</b>									
1988-89	1.6	—	0.3	0.6	3.3	90.3	3.8	0.1	100.0
1990-91	1.7	0.1	0.3	0.7	4.0	88.1	5.0	0.2	100.0
1995-96	3.0	0.0	0.6	2.2	5.4	78.8	10.0	—	100.0
<b>INDIA</b>									
1993 - 94	3.0	1.1	1.1	2.9	3.5	77.2	11.3	—	100.0
<b>NEPAL</b>									
1971	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.4	98.2	0.7	—	100.0
1981	0.5	0.0	1.1	0.5	0.1	96.1	1.7	1.0	100.0
1991	0.7	0.1	0.3	1.7	3.8	90.5	2.0	1.1	100.0
<b>PAKISTAN</b>									
1984-85	5.6	0.2	0.6	1.2	4.5	75.0	12.8	0.1	100.0
1985-86	5.6	0.2	0.5	1.4	3.8	78.3	10.1	—	100.0
1986-87	5.1	0.2	0.8	1.2	3.6	76.3	12.9	—	100.0
1987-88	5.9	0.3	0.9	2.1	3.8	72.3	14.8	—	100.0
1990-91	7.1	0.2	1.0	2.8	5.4	66.0	17.6	—	100.0
1991-92	6.6	0.1	0.7	3.2	3.8	68.7	16.8	—	100.0
1992-93	6.9	0.3	0.9	2.6	4.6	68.8	15.8	—	100.0
1993-94	6.9	0.3	0.9	2.6	4.6	68.8	15.8	—	100.0
<b>SRI LANKA</b>									
1963	8.5	0.2	1.0	1.9	10.0	62.8	14.0	1.6	100.0
1971	9.1	0.1	2.4	2.1	5.7	61.1	16.7	2.8	100.0
1981	14.1	0.4	6.0	3.0	4.3	52.1	16.8	2.0	100.0
1985/86	8.7	0.1	4.6	5.7	5.9	53.4	21.6	0.0	100.0
* 1994	14.6 1	0.8	6.6	5.6	—	23.0	49.4 3	0.0	100.0
* 1996	12.0 2	0.6	7.4	9.5	—	22.7	47.0 4	0.8	100.0

All figures relate to the age groups 10 years and above.

Cont...

<u>Countries</u>	<u>Notes</u>	<u>Sources</u>
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Based on the extended labour force definition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96</i>, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, December 1996.</li> </ul>
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Figures relate to usually working according to both principal and subsidiary status.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Employment and Unemployment in India</i>, National Sample Survey Organization 1993-94, Department of Statistics, Government of India, March 1997.</li> <li>● <i>Manpower Profile: India Yearbook</i>, Institute of Manpower Research, New Delhi, 1997.</li> </ul>
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In 1971 and 1981 Censuses, for defining economically active population, the minimum length of time period of work was at least eight months of the preceding year, whereas for the 1991 Census it was any length of time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Population Monograph of Nepal</i>, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, His Majesty's Government, 1995.</li> <li>● <i>Employment in Nepal: Prospects and Policies</i>, ILO-SAAT, New Delhi, 1997.</li> </ul>
Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● —</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics</i>, 54th issue, ILO, Geneva, 1995.</li> </ul>
Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● *Excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces</li> <li>1 Includes 4.2% of technical workers.</li> <li>2 Includes 4.2% of technical workers.</li> <li>3 Includes 4.2% of technical workers.</li> <li>4 Includes 4.2% of technical workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka</i>, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December 1997.</li> </ul>

Table 2.8 : Share of Female Workforce in Total Workforce by Major Occupational Categories in South Asia

Year	Professional/ Technical & Related Work	Administrative/ & Managerial	Clerical	Sales	Service	Agriculture/ Animal Husbandry	Production related work	Workers not Classified	All Divisions
<b>BANGLADESH</b>									
1988-89	26.3	—	6.2	2.6	46.3	50.6	14.6	—	41.3
1990-91	22.9	9.6	6.1	3.2	46.7	50.6	13.8	—	39.3
1995-96	34.7	4.9	10.4	7.4	58.6	47.1	24.5	—	38.2
<b>INDIA</b>									
1993 - 94	26.6	27.2	11.9	14.0	33.3	39.4	20.8	—	32.5
<b>NEPAL</b>									
1971	—	4.2	3.9	12.1	15.7	30.4	—	—	29.2
1981	16.6	6.6	5.8	14.6	14.5	36.4	19.2	15.1	34.6
1991	15.1	9.3	10.0	22.6	25.1	45.1	15.8	20.9	40.4
<b>PAKISTAN</b>									
1994-95	15.5	2.1	1.7	1.2	9.6	14.5	4.5	4.1	9.6
1995-96	17.5	2.0	1.4	1.4	8.9	15.0	4.3	—	10.3
1996-97	17.4	3.0	2.8	1.4	10.9	20.6	6.3	—	13.2
1997-98	18.1	4.2	2.9	2.2	10.1	16.6	6.7	—	11.7
1990-91	18.0	4.1	2.9	2.2	10.1	16.6	6.7	—	11.7
1991-92	18.3	3.1	2.7	2.9	13.9	17.8	8.5	—	12.6
1992-93	20.2	1.8	2.5	3.9	11.6	20.8	9.4	—	14.4
1993-94	20.1	3.4	2.9	2.9	14.2	20.7	8.7	—	14.0
	20.1	3.6	2.9	2.9	14.1	20.7	8.7	—	14.0
<b>SRI LANKA</b>									
1963	38.7	3.4	1.0	1.9	10.0	24.9	12.4	20.5	24.2
1971	41.1	5.9	10.5	6.3	23.2	27.8	14.6	25.0	20.5
1981	44.9	9.5	22.2	7.9	17.7	24.1	13.2	20.9	22.2
1985/86	49.6	6.9	25.3	20.1	37.7	33.9	23.6	3.1	20.7
*1994	56.4 <sup>1</sup>	14.8	41.5	15.7	—	24.3	28.7 <sup>3</sup>	1.9	30.2
*1996	52.7 <sup>1</sup>	12.1	46.2	22.8	—	29.5	24.9 <sup>3</sup>	13.1	28.6

All figures relate to the age groups 10 years and above.  
Notes and Sources: Same as for Table 2.7.

**Table 2.9: Unemployment Rates by Sex in South Asia**

Year	Male	Female	All
<b>BANGLADESH</b>			
<b>Usual Definition</b>			
1989	1.3	1.0	1.8
1990-91	2.0	1.9	2.8
1995-96	2.7	6.3	3.4
<b>Extended Definition</b>			
1989	1.3	1.0	1.2
1990-91	2.0	1.9	1.9
1995-96	2.7	2.3	2.5
<b>NDIA</b>			
1977-78	3.2	5.5	3.8
1983	2.4	1.1	1.2
1987-88	2.7	2.8	2.7
1993-94	2.1	1.7	1.9
<b>NEPAL</b>			
1977	5.3	6.0	5.6
1984-85	2.6	3.6	3.1
1995-96	5.5	4.3	4.9
<b>PAKISTAN</b>			
1985	4.0	1.5	3.7
1986	3.6	1.7	3.6
1987	3.1	1.1	3.1
1988	3.1	0.9	3.1
1991	6.3	16.8	6.3
1992	5.9	14.2	5.9
1993	4.7	10.3	4.7
1994	4.7	10.3	4.7
<b>SRI LANKA</b>			
1963	8.9	7.6	7.3
1969-70	11.4	21.2	13.9
1971	14.3	31.1	18.7
1973	18.9	36.3	24.0
1975	14.3	32.9	19.9
1978-79	9.2	24.9	14.7
1980-81	12.4	23.0	15.8
1981	13.2	31.8	17.8
1981-82	7.8	21.3	11.7
1985-86	10.8	20.8	14.1
1990	9.1	23.4	14.0
*1994	11.4	17.9	13.3
*1996	8.8	16.2	11.1

All figures relate to the age group 10 years and above.

Notes and Sources: Same as for Table 2.5 above.

Pakistan began to use a more detailed questionnaire to elicit women's labour market involvement, especially in unpaid work. In India also, unemployment rates for women recorded by NSS data are generally higher than the corresponding rates for males, especially for more literate workers. Same is the case in Bangladesh.

Patterns of underemployment and unemployment differ among men and women in all countries of the region. In general, women exhibit a higher rate of underemployment than men do in all five countries. In Bangladesh, for instance, the extent of underemployment<sup>13</sup> was recorded to be as high as 70.7 per cent for women as compared to 12.4 per cent for men. In Nepal, the corresponding figures are reported to be 54.6 per cent for women as against 39.7 per cent for men.<sup>14</sup> This is understandable, since women workers spend a large portion of their labouring activities in domestic work.

Similar consistent patterns emerge from gender disaggregated unemployment data thrown up by Labour Force Surveys in all the countries of the region. In general, unemployment rates among women are higher than the corresponding rates for men in all the countries of the region, especially as one moves up the levels of education. In Bangladesh, a female graduate in the labour force can expect a 15.3 per cent rate of unemployment as against a graduate male who faces a much lower incidence of unemployment at 9.3 per cent.<sup>15</sup> In Pakistan, the reported rates of unemployment were 10.3 per cent for women and 3.8 per cent for men respectively in the year 1994.<sup>16</sup> Age specific unemployment rates in Pakistan suggest that while girl children are pushed into the job market early, they are faced with higher levels of unemployment compared to their male counterparts. In 1991-92, the rate of unemployment among girls in the age group of 10-11 years was as high as 40 per cent as compared to 13.9 per cent for boys.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, reported unemployment rates among women in Sri Lanka are much higher than the corresponding rates for males in general, sometimes by a factor of two. For instance, in 1994 the recorded unemployment rate among females was 20.8 per cent, as opposed to 9.9 per cent among men, and the gender difference in rates increases as one moves up the levels of literacy.<sup>18</sup>

An interesting picture emerges from the data on unemployment for men and women in the region. Among the really poor/uneducated population, the difference in unemployment rates between the sexes is not that prominent, nor is the level that high. The poor of either gender have abominably low reservation wage rates. They normally do not have the option of staying unemployed and are compelled to pick up any work, whatever the pay, in order to survive. However, among the more literate segments of the population, who are also likely to be less poor, the question of options arises, and so do gender differences in unemployment rates. When women start acquiring skills, i.e., move up the literacy scales, they are faced with increasingly more difficult options than men in finding jobs of their choice.

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<sup>13</sup> Defined as the percentage of those working less than 35 hours weekly to the total number of employed persons. *Report on LFS 1995-96*, p. 65. Appendix table B.5

<sup>14</sup> LSMS, World Bank 1995-96. See *Employment in Nepal: Prospects and Policies*. ILO-SAAT, New Delhi, 1997. p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Figures derived from data in the *Report on LFS in Bangladesh 1995-96*, BBS, December 1996, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> *ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, 1995, 54th issue.

<sup>17</sup> *Women in Pakistan: A Country Profile*, UN-ESCAP 1996, p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> CENWOR (1995), p. 163

It is not possible to draw definitive conclusions on the structure and functioning of labour markets for men and women just from the kind of evidence cited above. But the gender differences in the incidence of unemployment and underemployment that show up in the data from large Labour Force Surveys in all the countries of the region, indicate that there are some strong inherent tendencies that demarcate and differentiate women's labour market involvement from men's, as also their chances of gaining access to suitable employment opportunities.

A number of micro studies provide insights into the underlying mechanisms of this phenomenon. Part of the explanation can be tied up with employers' preference to avoid recruiting women in view of the accompanying cost of statutory provision of maternity benefits or crèche facilities for women employees. This has been an important reason for the steady decline in the incidence of female workers in sectors such as factories, plantation and mining in India. It must be remembered that this can only be a very limited explanation, given that the coverage and implementation of this legislation is very low (Chapter 5). Thus, while employment of women has been going up in the secondary and tertiary sectors in the region, most of such new employment generated in these sectors is taking place only in the unprotected informal sector, not covered by labour laws. These are precisely the kinds of activities which are also highly casualised and irregular, thereby raising the recorded rates of underemployment and unemployment among women workers. The more literate who want formal sector jobs, therefore have to spend on an average a longer waiting period in the process of job search.

Another feature worth noting is the persistently higher level of unemployment among educated women workers as compared to the corresponding male percentages (See Appendix tables). This could be explained partly by the discrimination against educated women for skilled jobs, and partly by the reluctance of employers to hire women workers because of the burden of providing maternity and child care benefits.

## 2.6 Wages and Earnings

The Labour Force Survey of 1995-96 in Bangladesh shows that female wages as a percentage of male wages are roughly 60 per cent in both rural and urban areas of that country.<sup>19</sup> The 50th round of NSS carried out in 1993-94 in India provides male and female wage rates by industrial divisions, rural and urban location, and literacy level of workers.<sup>20</sup> It is clear from the data given in the Appendices that there is an enormous discrepancy in wage rates of men and women even when one controls for the level of literacy and rural/urban location. The female to male wage rate ratio varies considerably across industrial categories, education of the worker and location of the work site. Without going into details, these findings suggest substantial imperfections in the functioning of the labour markets in the country.

The data on wages from Nepal over time and across industrial categories and developmental zones suggest that female wages have generally been 15 per cent to 20 per cent lower than the corresponding male wage rates for daily workers.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Figures derived from data in the *Report on LFS in Bangladesh 1995-96*, BBS, December 1997, p. 177. Also see same report, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix I3 and Appendix I4.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix Table N5.

Comparisons of wages and earnings between groups is most difficult since the nature of jobs as well as the skill component of the worker is difficult to standardise. Nevertheless, broad comparisons of wages of men and women workers of roughly equivalent skills suggests large differences in wage rates of men and women in all countries of the region. In Bangladesh, the average wage rate of a woman day labourer is barely 56 per cent of what her male counterpart earns.<sup>22</sup> In India, it is only 60 per cent.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note that while the rates of unemployment among unskilled/illiterate workers are not very different for men and women, the wage rates of employed women workers as percentages of corresponding male wage rates continue to be very low. In other words, while gender differences in unemployment rates go up as one moves up literacy levels, gender differences in wage rates increase as one reverses the direction. Thus, literate women are less likely to get a job than literate males, but once they do, the gender differences in wages are likely to be less pronounced for them than their less literate sisters. Such a pattern of differences can be traced in all the countries in the region for which comparable data are available.

Further, there is significant variation in the female to male wage rates not only across sectors and regions but also over time. The female to male wage parity for agricultural day labourers in Nepal between 1980-81 and 1992-93 fluctuated from 66 per cent in 1980-81 to 100 per cent in 1987-88 and down to 63 per cent in 1992-93.<sup>24</sup> Such variations have corresponded closely with systematic variations in the levels of real wage rates. During the late 1980s when the real wage rates of agricultural day labourers had gone up to the highest level in the period under question, the female to male wage ratio had correspondingly gone up to 100 per cent. When the real wages slumped from 37 Nepalese Rupees in 1988-89 to 24 Nepalese Rupees in 1992-93 at 1987-88 prices, the female to male wage ratio went down from 100 per cent to a low of 63 per cent. This suggests that wage rates for both male and female workers respond substantially to market demand conditions, but when demand slackens, female wages and female employment take a more than proportionate beating, suggesting the existence of market segmentation. It may be worthwhile to note that such patterns of gender differences in wages are less prominent in Sri Lanka where labour, both male and female, have enjoyed comparatively greater protection than elsewhere in the subcontinent.<sup>25</sup>

Proper comparisons of wage disparities would require identification of work of equivalent worth. Such data are not easy to come by. It is essential, therefore, to cross classify the data on wages into as fine a detail as possible to gauge the true extent of wage discrimination against female workers. It is important to note that such differences vary across major occupational groups, industrial categories, literacy levels of workers, the public sector and private sector and between the formal and informal sectors. The fact that in Bangladesh, 62 per cent of all wage and salaried female employees are in the private informal sector as opposed to 32.8 per cent of their male counterparts<sup>26</sup> explains the differences in wages earned by female employees as compared to males.

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<sup>22</sup> Derived from the data in the Report on LFS in Bangladesh 1995-96, BBS, December 1996, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> NSS 50th round, 1993-94. The female to male wage rates vary substantially across sectors, rural/urban locations and individual categories.

<sup>24</sup> ILO/SAAT (1997), p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Report of LFS 1995-96, p. 139.

## 2.7 Summary of Findings

This chapter has brought together some of the salient features of female employment in South Asia. Better recording of women's economically productive activities has contributed to a perceptible increase in recorded female labour force participation rates in the region in recent times, particularly in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan. In interpreting data on various dimensions of female employment, however, care has to be taken to identify and separate out differences that show up because of definitional factors from those that show up due to structural changes in women's employment in these countries.<sup>27</sup>

Notwithstanding such problems, the overall picture that emerges is one of marked differences between male and female work patterns, types of occupations, labour status situations and earnings. In the absence of demonstrating work of equivalent worth, the existence of any or all of these features may not by themselves necessarily prove the existence of discrimination as such. However, the severity and the persistence with which the cleavages show up in the data strongly suggest that both job discrimination and wage discrimination exist in the South Asian labour markets. What is more, the data seem to suggest that for the large majority of women, the gaps may even be widening over time.

The broad conclusions emerging from the evidence and analysis presented in this chapter can be stated as follows.

- The labour force participation rate of women, though generally lower than that of men, has shown a feeble tendency to rise over time. There are two noteworthy characteristics of labour force participation of South Asian women. First, the participation rate, when plotted against income or educational level, moves along a U-shaped curve. Second, participatory behaviour shows no change over the reproductive years.
- Women's recorded involvement in primary sector activities continues to be very high in South Asia. The only possible exception to this pattern is Sri Lanka, where, in recent years, information from the troubled northern and eastern parts of the island, where a large number of women are employed in the plantation sector, has not been forthcoming. In terms of percentage distributions, there does appear to be a mild fall in female involvement in the primary sector, although the rate of decline has been slow over time. Given that corresponding male distributions show a sharper decline, the percentage share of women in the primary sector has gone up in recent years in all the countries, with the exception of Bangladesh which registered a perceptible increase in the feminisation of the manufacturing workforce.
- Contrary to popular belief, there is no significant long term trend of increasing feminisation of the recorded workforce in South Asia. The one exception to this statement is Nepal, which exhibits a sharp increase in female share in the workforce over two decades of Census counts. The apparent increase in the share of women in Pakistan's workforce in recent

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<sup>27</sup> As can be seen from Table B3 in the Appendix, estimates of female labour force participation rates using the extended definition can be four to five times higher than corresponding estimates using the usual definition. No perceptible differences exist for male estimates.



years is due to a more accurate recording of the female labour force in the Labour Force Surveys of the 1990s. The data also suggest a rising trend in the induction of women in professional, technical, administrative and managerial capacities, although the percentages continue to be very low.

- In terms of labour status categories, most countries of the region show the preponderance of self-employment and of unpaid family labour. The only exception to this rule is Sri Lanka, where majority of women workers are employees. However, there does appear to be a declining trend in the incidence of self-employment and employment as unpaid family labour in the region, and a marginal increase in that of employees, especially in countries like Bangladesh, India and Nepal.
- Recorded unemployment rates suggest that female unemployment rates appear to be more volatile than male rates over time in almost all the countries of the region; and female unemployment rates tend to be persistently higher than the corresponding male rates, especially in recent years. This is particularly so in Sri Lanka, which has a much higher percentage of educated women in the workforce compared to any other country in the region.
- It is very difficult to get comparable sex-disaggregated data on wages and earnings across countries, or even within the same country over time, or across industrial categories. Some information on these dimensions have been presented in the Statistical Appendix.<sup>28</sup> In order to prove the existence or otherwise of wage discrimination, one has to compare work of equivalent worth. Clearly this is not possible with the data presented here. However, gender differences in occupational structures, coupled with a significant downward bias in female earnings even after correcting for educational levels or skill categories, clearly suggests that serious job as well as wage discrimination persists in South Asia. The aggregative data presented in this chapter submerges the small but growing sector of highly paid and highly qualified professional women in the region. Nevertheless, more detailed micro studies suggest that there is an increasing incidence of women workers in the region who are emerging as equals of their male counterparts in the competitive, top-ends of the labour market. Some impressions about this phenomenon can be obtained from emerging changes in occupational profiles of the female workforce presented above. Despite the low numerical weightage of this segment in the total employed workforce, it signals the intensification of the nascent dualism in the structure of female employment in the region.

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<sup>28</sup> See pages 139 and 177, *Report of LFS in Bangladesh 1995-96*, Tables I3 and I4 in the Statistical Appendix for India; Table N5 for Nepal, and Table SL5 for Sri Lanka

## CHAPTER 3

# THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF WOMEN'S WORK

### 3.1 Material Conditions of Women's Work

Chapter 2 pointed to the existence of a high degree of segmentation in South Asian labour markets. This is manifested in gender differences in industrial and occupational distributions, labour status categories as well as in the structure of wages and earnings. What the data can at best suggest are the ground realities of women's work in South Asia, i.e. the material conditions under which the vast majority of women workers carry out their daily labouring activities. What the data cannot demonstrate is the manner in which a whole range of social, cultural and religious sanctions circumscribe women's work environment or reveal the extent of neglect of poor women and their livelihoods by the policy planning processes.

Micro evidence from all over the region establishes that, in the perception of poor women, the major problems in the area of work relate to low wages and inadequate work opportunities.<sup>29</sup> The vast majority of women workers in South Asia work under severe exploitative conditions; are concentrated in bottom rung jobs, even within the informal sector;<sup>30</sup> and are regularly exposed to occupational safety and health hazards.<sup>31</sup>

While low incomes and irregular employment prospects confront most workers, specific categories of women workers are exposed to specific types of risks. Young women workers working in export processing zones (EPZs) not only face exploitative wages and little job security, they are also often subjected to restrictive practices and harassment.<sup>32</sup> Female workers in EPZs are often debarred from moving out of their place of work and are not allowed to unionise.<sup>33</sup> Migrant women workers face the additional problems associated with displacement. Sexual harassment of migrant women workers in Sri Lanka and young garment workers in Bangladesh has been extensively reported.<sup>34</sup>

Sociological studies have established that gender plays an important role in determining social roles and responsibilities in South Asian societies. Men rarely share the responsibilities of housework, even in families where women are fully engaged in the labour market. Thus, employment almost invariably entails a double burden for women in South Asia, except perhaps

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<sup>29</sup> Purushothaman (1998).

<sup>30</sup> Mukhopadhyay (1997).

<sup>31</sup> Shram Shakti (1987).

<sup>32</sup> Kemp (1993).

<sup>33</sup> Feldman (1993).

<sup>34</sup> CENWOR (1997); Kibria (1998).

in affluent families that can afford hired domestic help. This severely constrains the ability of women to devote their energies to income earning opportunities and move up the job ladder. Micro studies from different parts of India show that even in situations where adult males opt to stay unemployed because of prevailing low wage rates in the market, women from the same families work full time outside the house for the same low wages and also bear the full burden of domestic responsibilities without help from their unemployed men folk.

Similarly, social hierarchies and religious taboos have been known to put a range of restrictions on women's labour market involvement in the region. In practice, gender subordination gets manifested in restrictions of various kinds imposed on women. Obvious examples are restrictions on women's physical mobility and association with outsiders, resulting in practices such as the 'purdah'. When changes are introduced in the pattern of women's work due to changes in external circumstances, the impact of religious and social hierarchies gets metamorphosed into new forms of subordination. It has been reported that young Bangladeshi females working in the factories of EPZs are allowed to work only on the condition that their continued subordination is ensured by locking them up within the factories (Feldman, 1993). The small fragment of female workforce which has managed to break the barrier comes almost wholly from the affluent upper strata of society. It is against this background that this chapter attempts to trace the impact of the changing economic environment on women's work in South Asia.

## **3.2 Changing Economic Environment**

All the five countries under review have embarked on fairly ambitious structural adjustment programmes within the last 15 to 20 years. This has implications for employment options available to the workforce.

### **3.2.1 Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, a comprehensive economic reform programme was launched in the early 1990s. The drive has been towards establishing a more liberalised, market-oriented, private sector driven economy with the objective of improving economic growth through better allocation of resources and increased domestic savings and investment. Imports have been liberalised and efforts made to ensure macro-economic stability through fiscal and financial sector reforms. Efforts have also been made to deregulate the industrial policy regime, promote infrastructural development and initiate trade reforms to infuse dynamism in the economy.

### **3.2.2 India**

Economic reforms initiated in India in the mid 1980s gathered momentum in the aftermath of the fiscal crisis of 1991-92. A series of macro economic measures were undertaken to restructure the economy: liberalisation of direct foreign investment, expansion of external commercial borrowing, trade reforms including foreign exchange market reforms, reforms in the financial sector and restructuring of the public sector (Jalan, 1992).

## Women in the Garment Sector

In export processing zones around the globe, women workers are generally preferred over men. A number of factors have been cited for this preference, such as the relative docility of women workers and the fact that women are 'nimble fingered'. These 'positive' qualities of women workers however, do not translate into higher wages or better job conditions, for one of the oft-cited reasons for employers' preferences is also that women come cheaper.

While the textile and garment industry in most parts of Asia has been largely run by female labour, in South Asia, cultural factors have militated against women's wage work. However, things are changing. Since the 1980s, Bangladesh has seen a high rate of expansion in the garment sector employing mainly young women, usually from rural backgrounds and with no previous wage work experience. To analyze this phenomenon, one needs to understand not merely the factors affecting demand for female labour in the textile and garment sector but also those that propel young women to such work.

Micro studies have dwelt on the low wages, long hours of work and generally exploitative work conditions under which garment workers have to work. They have also drawn attention to the associated hazards of sexual harassment at work (Mazumdar and Choudhury, 1993), the risk of inviting social sanctions and the occupational safety problems these workers face (Feldman, 1994). If women still flock to factory gates and EPZs for jobs in the garment sector, there must be some explanation for it.

A study based on personal interviews of a large number of garment workers in Bangladesh reveals that extreme poverty, endemic male unemployment and the absence of other viable alternatives are some of the factors that have pushed a large number of young females into this sector. The community network operates as a channel for mobilizing young women for the sector, while marital breakdowns and uncertain marriage prospects foster the push.

Jobs in the garment sector are clearly exploitative. But the fact that young women are flocking to factory gates in such large numbers suggest that getting into garments is better than the other options these women have. The challenge for the policy planner is to devise policies to ease their situation by providing safe housing and transportation, ensuring remunerative wages and enforcing a better work environment.

Source : Nazli Kibria, " Becoming a Garment Worker: The Mobilization of Women into the Garment Factories in Bangladesh," Occasional Paper 9, UNRISD, Geneva, March 1998.

### 3.2.3 Nepal

Sustained deterioration in internal and external economic performance propelled Nepal to embark upon a stabilisation programme in 1985 under IMF initiatives. This included devaluation of the Nepalese Rupee, restraint on public sector expenditure and external borrowing, reformulation of the pricing policy and trade liberalisation. The aim was to remove structural constraints in growth initiatives in agricultural and industrial sectors, through better fiscal and monetary administration and greater involvement of the private sector.

### **3.2.4 Pakistan**

A high fiscal deficit of 8.5 per cent of GDP by 1987-88 in Pakistan prompted the Government of Pakistan to embark on a stabilization programme from the late 1980s onwards under the structural adjustment facility of the IMF. These efforts were renewed in the early 1990s, so that by 1993-94, the fiscal deficit fell to 5.9 per cent. Structural reforms included an increased tempo in privatisation of state owned enterprises, reforms of the financial sector, liberalisation of foreign exchange transactions and tax reforms (World Bank, 1995).

### **3.2.5 Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, the shift towards more market friendly policy and introduction of World Bank-IMF sponsored structural adjustment programmes started as early as 1977. Like elsewhere, the package contained liberalisation of trade and related foreign exchange market reforms, decontrolling prices, restructuring public expenditure, privatisation of public enterprises and promotion of market friendly policies. The reforms were intensified from 1989 onwards, with higher devaluation, privatisation, reduction in subsidies and social sector expenditure (CENWOR, 1997).

## **3.3 Effects of Structural Adjustment**

The overall impact of these macro policy measures on women's work and employment is difficult to assess. However, the response to structural adjustment programmes from feminist circles in South Asia has been generally negative (Ghosh, 1996; Jayaweera, 1996; John, 1995; UNIFEM and CIDA, 1995). Results of some micro studies that have been carried out on the impact of specific policies such as trade liberalization on women's employment, reinforce this view (Chhachi et. al., 1996; Rosa, 1994; Heyzer and Sen, 1994; Sen, 1996).

A fair amount of analysis of the likely impact of structural adjustment programmes on women has been based largely on a priori reasoning. As Elson points out, there is an inherent bias against women in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of structural adjustment programmes. This is because the main thrust of these programmes is on correcting the macro-economic balance through greater reliance on the free market. However, women's unpaid labour within the family which almost single-handedly caters to reproduction and maintenance of human resources, falls outside the purview of the market. Even if structural adjustment programmes achieve allocative efficiency in the market, such achievements are bound to be partial, since by ignoring altogether the allocation of women's labouring activities outside the market sphere, it takes a partial view of the total labour allocation process (Elson, 1991). In addition, a number of analysts have pointed out that the introduction of structural adjustment programmes may be associated with a possible worsening of the employment scenario for women workers even within the market sphere. This could be due to a range of factors, some of which pertain to all workers, men and women, while others are specifically disadvantageous to women.

First, by downplaying labour rights and job security requirements, reforms have been seen as unfavourable to all workers, including women workers. To the extent security and protection at work are less common for new jobs, fresh entrants to the labour market bear the biggest brunt.

Since they are entering the labour force at a higher rate than men, women are likely to be relatively more disadvantaged.

Second, due to privatization of publicly owned concerns, a large number of workers are subjected to the insecurities of private sector jobs.

Third, globalisation erodes the 'level playing field' of domestic enterprises, whereby these are likely to lose out in competition to multinational firms, thereby increasing the vulnerability of local workers, including women workers.

Fourth, structural adjustment programmes generate all kinds of changes in the household economic environment. Adult male earners in many households may be faced with unemployment, job switches, or prospects of migration for job search. The brunt of the change in the economic environment of households is generally borne by women. As home managers, women tend to absorb the effect of external shocks by trying to neutralise the adverse impact of such changes on children, the aged, and other family members. In the event of unemployment of male earners, women may be forced to join the labour force to ensure family survival.

Fifth, structural reforms have been associated with a reduction of state responsibility in most sectors, including the social sector. As a result, social sector needs that may have been catered to by the state earlier, may have to be taken care of within the domestic sphere. Women, who are burdened with the responsibility of home management, including healthcare and care of the aged, are likely to be most affected.

Finally, to the extent that reforms lead to a rise in prices of basic necessities, managing the household within restructured budgets also becomes an added burden for women.

Studies done in the region have produced evidence to substantiate some of these fears. As Beneria has suggested, structural adjustment at the macro level is associated with a number of different kinds of adjustments at the household level. These could be *labour increasing adjustments* by different members of the household, household budgetary adjustments such as reduction or restructuring of household expenditure structures, and *livelihood restructuring adjustments* (Beneria 1995). Instability induced adjustments are likely to hit the poor harder.

Unless corroborated by adequate econometric analysis, it is difficult to surmise to what extent any or all of these forces may have been operative in South Asian countries. However, certain broad characteristics of women's labour market involvement suggest that, whatever effect the reforms packages may have had, the direct impact of reforms on women's employment has been marginal.

A major reason for this is that the large majority of women workers in South Asia, with the possible exception of Sri Lanka, have been engaged in agricultural activities long before the adjustment programmes were initiated and continue to be so till date. Since the agricultural sector has been relatively insulated from the impact of reforms, one may say that the reforms package has had only a limited impact on the female workforce in South Asia. However, this does not preclude the possibility that some segments of women workers have been adversely affected by the introduction of these programmes: The poor conditions of employment of women workers in EPZs in some South and South East Asian countries have been held up as symbols,

even though the number of workers involved may not be very large (Lim, 1991). Micro studies from Nepal and Pakistan which deal with women workers in export oriented industries such as carpet making, have suggested poor working conditions and exploitative work arrangements (Manushi, 1993). However, as has been argued by some, these conditions have been pervasive in these economies, with or without reforms.

There is the other side of the picture as well. In Bangladesh, trade liberalisation and expansion of work opportunities for women in the garment industry sector have benefited women workers in more ways than one. While there are some problems associated with this form of employment, the trade-offs appear to be pretty much in favour of the workers (Majumdar and Choudhury, 1993; Kibria 1998).

Liberalisation has also brought about changes in the structure and environment of production such as in cropping patterns and associated changes in the degree of commercialisation of agriculture in some areas. In studies of gender based labour use patterns in mountain societies in recent years, it was found that with increasing commercialisation of agriculture, the operation-wise gender division of work has undergone perceptible changes. However such changing work patterns occur strictly within the parameters of gender hierarchies. While women do get involved in more diversified operations, such diversification is not associated with greater control over earnings. Also, new cropping patterns in the study areas have led to significant decreases in fodder output, necessitating deployment of longer female hours of work for fodder collection (ICIMOD, 1997).

The data presented in Chapter 2 suggest some changes in the distribution of workforce by labour status categories in post-reform years, such as increases in the degree of casualisation of female labour in India. There is also clear evidence that the induction of women in administrative and managerial positions, although still small, has been growing at a faster rate in the 1990s as compared to the earlier period. The rate of growth of women's employment in organised private sector firms in the post-reform era in some cases has been higher, not merely over corresponding male rates, but also female rates in pre-reform years.<sup>35</sup> Thus, clearly reforms have not had universal and unambiguous gender discriminatory effects.

This does not preclude the possibility that structural reforms may have had strong, albeit indirect adverse affects on poor women. By cutting down on public provision of social goods and by exposing the economic system to risks of market fluctuations, reforms are likely to affect the poor much more adversely than other groups simply because the poor can ill-afford such risks. Recent newspaper reports from southern states in India have highlighted a series of suicides

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<sup>35</sup> The compound annual rate of growth of female employment in the organised private sector in India in the period 1991-96 was 4.56 per cent. The rate for the period 1981-91 was only 1.03 per cent. The corresponding male rates work out to be much lower at 2.09 per cent and 0.37 per cent respectively. Rate of growth of employment in the public sector in the post-1991 era as compared to the 1980s, has understandably been lower for both women and men. The rates are 2.34 per cent for women and 0.39 per cent for men in the period 1991-96, and 4.59 per cent for women and 2.10 per cent for men in the period 1981-91. Thus even within the public sector, women appear to have enjoyed a better deal as compared to men. See Tables 3.2.20 and 3.2.22 in "Manpower Profile", *India Yearbook 1997*, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, 1997.

among small and marginal farmers who had recently switched to cotton production lured by high profits, but faced virtual extinction following poor crops. Such examples where reforms have affected poverty stricken households, and women only indirectly as members of such households, are likely to be more common than where women are singled out as sufferers.

The conclusion seems to be that structural adjustment programmes tend to adversely affect women wherever the conditions have already been gender adverse prior to the implementation of these programmes. It is important that such basic conditions be looked into, along with the direct impact of macro policy on various segments of the workforce.<sup>36</sup> Also, there is a need to look at the entire gamut of changes initiated by these macro policies, over and above the immediate and most direct impacts. Better designed research studies are needed to assess the overall effect of macro policies than are currently available. But, by and large, there is evidence of an emerging dualism in female labour markets in these countries which appears to have gained an added fillip in the post-reform years.

### **3.4 Technological Changes and Women's Employment**

As with structural adjustment programmes, the reaction of the women's movement towards the issue of technological change has been by and large negative. This negative attitude has a strong basis in the statistical evidence as well. Specific types of changes in technology have brought about significant displacement of female labour in several sectors and industries in this region in the recent past. One of the most elaborately documented evidence can be obtained from the displacement of female labour from manual paddy pounding (dhenki) by mechanized rice mills in rural Bangladesh (IRRI, 1985). Similar evidence exists of the displacement of home based workers, including a large number of women, engaged in the handloom sector by the introduction of powerlooms in India and Pakistan (Jain, 1984; ICIMOD, 1997). In Sri Lanka there is similar evidence (Amarasuriya, 1993). The body of data from various countries of Asia on women's work in the agricultural sector suggests displacement of female labour by agricultural mechanisation (Ahmed, 1994; Agarwal, 1985; Whitehead, 1985).

Technological change often affects women's employment prospects more adversely than men's. It needs to be understood that the gender bias related to technological change which seems to be pervasive is more a result of the socio-economic context within which such technology is applied, rather than any specific feature of the technology as such. Gender roles are usually assigned long before the change takes place. Women are generally assigned repetitive tasks. Mechanisation is often profitable for tasks and operations that are repetitive - precisely the kinds of work that women are assigned within most production organisations in South Asia. Therefore, the fault, if any, lies not with technology per se, but with the social context of women's work in traditional systems (Sen, 1985). The adverse effects of technological change can only be controlled if due attention is paid to the context of women's work.

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<sup>36</sup> For a point of view explicating the importance of context in the evaluation of macro policy and macro economic concepts especially for women, see Mukhopadhyay (1994).



It is important to monitor not just the direct impact of technological change on women but also its overall impact on women's employment and their life situation outside the labour market. There is a large body of literature on the impact of HYV technology on women's employment prospects in South Asian countries, especially in India and Bangladesh. By and large, HYV technology has increased overall employment opportunities for all workers, including women. However, the structure and pattern of labour use on land has changed significantly. While wage employment for casual female labour has gone up substantially, the workload of unpaid family workers, mostly women, has gone up, without commensurate benefits (Agarwal, 1985; Sen, 1985).

Technological innovations have taken place mostly for tasks and operations which are primarily carried out by men. There has been a spate of new equipment and machines such as tractors and combine harvesters that are used in agricultural production, which have made agricultural tasks such as ploughing and harvesting less arduous for men but there have been no such innovations for operations like transplanting, which is done primarily by women. Also woman-specific operations, if mechanised, are generally usurped by men (Ahmed, 1985). When new technology creates new tasks, tasks without tools, and tedious tasks generally go to women, and tasks which require tools and equipment generally go to men (Kolli and Bentilan, 1997).

A growing number of women in these countries are getting into areas that require skills, such as in the area of new information technology. These are women with the requisite educational background and training in computer skills. However, two disclaimers apply. One, as a percentage of the total female workforce in these countries, their number is still very insignificant. Two, within this sector itself, women are concentrated in the lower rungs: as computer operators rather than as software experts. In manufacturing industry, sectors which use advanced information technology and employ large numbers of women, such as the garment manufacturing sector using CAD/CAM technology, women employees work as users of end products of advanced technologies rather than as operators. For instance, garment workers get to manufacture garments designs from a CAD/CAM process (Banerji, 1996).

Special efforts are needed to counter the inherent patriarchal bias that permeates the process of technology adoption in the economy. One of the major bottlenecks in equitable distribution of gains from technological advancement is organisational. Even in the case of technology that is supposed to be pro-poor, such as bio-technology in rural areas, organizational bottlenecks can become a major constraint that prevents percolation of benefits of technological innovations to the poorest groups and women. A study on alternative energy technologies in Hissar district of Haryana in India reveals that for all the alternative technologies considered, the benefit/cost ratio increases as one moves up the socio-economic ladder of households, or the size of ownership holdings (Yadav, Gandhi and Nagpal, 1993). Thus, size becomes a determining criterion for viability.

A survey on the impact of technological change on rural women in South Asia and elsewhere has shown that change has led to greater concentration of women in domestic and non-market roles and in more labour intensive activities (Ahmed, 1985). Even when technological innovations have been introduced in women-specific activities, these have been taken over by men, simply

because women lack access to corresponding skill development, training and working capital, due to institutionalised gender biases. Therefore, it is essential that such organisational and institutional bottlenecks are taken care of, if the benefits of technological innovations are to permeate to women.

That such an option is feasible and viable has been demonstrated by a number of field-based technological cooperation projects that are being run under the sponsorship of various bilateral and international organisations in the region. Many successful field based projects in this area have channeled improved technologies through participatory organisations of rural women and have established linkages with commercial suppliers of technology, training institutes and marketing channels (ILO, 1991).

A number of organisations have also been working on developing improved technologies for women specific tasks (*Moving Technology*, various issues). However without supplementary efforts at the organisational level, such initiatives are likely to bear little fruit for women's economic empowerment.

It is important to bear in mind that technology is not merely a question of machines and equipment, but also of the social organisation of production which goes along with the use of such equipment (Sen, 1984). Unless efforts are made to make such production arrangements gender sensitive, the mechanical dimension of technology which is supposedly gender neutral is likely to show up as inimical to the interests of women workers, if not in absolute, at least in relative terms.

### **3.5 Quality of Employment**

#### **3.5.1 Terms of Employment**

In recent years, an increasing number of women workers are being inducted in informal work arrangements. Irregular and insecure employment conditions with little or no legal protection and disproportionately low levels of pay in these jobs suggests that for large segments of the workforce, the quality of women's employment on an average is getting worse over time (see Chapter 2). However, one can also cite evidence to the contrary. In all the five countries of the region, women are also entering non-traditional sectors and taking up professional, managerial and executive jobs at a higher rate than ever before. Thus, it is difficult to conclude one way or another regarding the overall direction of change in the quality of employment. Nevertheless, despite the emergence of small enclaves of high profile jobs, it can be said unequivocally, that for the majority of women workers, the quality of employment continues to be extremely poor.

#### **3.5.2 Occupational Safety and Health Hazards**

The fact that the majority of women workers are in the informal sector and a very high percentage of them are exposed to alarming degrees of occupational and health hazards, unprotected by law, de facto, if not de jure, is well documented. Agricultural women workers engaged in operations like weeding, sowing, and transplantation suffer from postural problems, exposure to dust, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc. Cotton pickers and plantation workers are exposed to the

risk of lung infections, dermatitis and other contact diseases, and bleeding of fingers, apart from insect and snake bites. Mine and quarry workers are exposed to the risk of silicosis, respiratory problems and toxicity. The list is long.<sup>37</sup>

A problem common to the majority of women workers across South Asia is a combination of overwork and nutritional inadequacy. Poverty being endemic, women need to engage in economically productive activities for meeting their family's basic needs. Strong patriarchal traditions preclude the sharing of household work by men. Thus, all income earning and/or expenditure saving activities are carried out by poor women in addition to their household duties. Gender discrimination in intra-household allocation of food and nutrition is reflected in lower than the fair share for women of already meagre household supplies, leading to pervasive malnutrition and anaemia. The compulsions of child-bearing, especially bearing male children, lead to repeated pregnancies, exacerbating problems of poor nutrition and excessive work loads.

There is also the near total absence of awareness of whatever little legal protection such workers can access. Women factory workers in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal are covered by their respective formal sector Factories Acts. However, most women workers are unaware of their rights, and implementation of legislation such as these leaves much to be desired. The situation of women workers in units which are not covered by such protective legislation is even worse.

Another occupational hazard faced by women workers in paid employment outside the home, is the hazard of sexual harassment at work. The fear of such harassment and its actual incidence is high. However, there is hardly any systematic documentation of this malaise, nor is there any adequate institutionalised mechanism to combat it. This is an area which certainly needs proper documentation and remedial measures. In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court of India has recently provided the framework within which protection against sexual harassment can be sought as an inalienable fundamental right.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.5.3 Freedom of Organization and Collective Bargaining**

The majority of the South Asian workforce is outside the formal sector and not unionised. Women are worse off in terms of this indicator as compared to their male counterparts. The trade union movement has, by and large, been male dominated in these countries.

However, there are signs of change though small and imperceptible. In India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, most trade unions have women's wings in which women are becoming increasingly more articulate. In India, a number of unions in the unorganised sector have recently joined hands to form the National Centre for Labour (NCL). Some of the constituents of

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed description of occupational and health hazards faced by various categories of women workers in India, see Shram Shakti, The Report of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1987, pp. 142 -57.

<sup>38</sup> Vishaka and Ors vs. State of Rajasthan, August 1997. In its judgement, the Court defined what constitutes sexual harassment as well as laid down practices and procedures as preventive steps. *The Economic Times*, October 23, 1997.

NCL are dominated by women workers. For instance, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which has been a prime mover in the formation of NCL in India, is a union of women workers.

In addition to this, there is a growing trend of collective action and cooperative ventures by women in all countries of the region, often mediated by NGO intervention, and in some cases, through government initiatives. Many women's collectives have started all over the region with a number of objectives: from forming women's credit cooperatives to initiating joint awareness programmes for women. In India, large government programmes such as DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) are run on the basis of collective groups of 15-20 women as units. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which now covers over two million people, largely caters to groups of landless rural women for the purpose of credit delivery. Many bilateral and international agencies depend on women's collectives for channelling various resources and inputs. The Mahila Samakhya programme in India is a group-based informal literacy-cum-conscientisation programme for rural women, being carried out in nine states. Thus while collective bargaining in the work place is still almost non-existent for women in the formal sector, in the informal and rural sectors the women of South Asia are beginning to realise the benefits of collective awareness, if not collective action.

In sharp contrast to this, there is also a trend toward dismantling of collective bargaining practices and principles in the wake of liberalisation. Most EPZs in the region, which are generally run on female labour, do not permit the organisation of workers. These new entrants to the female workforce are therefore deprived of the freedom of organisation and collective bargaining.

#### **3.5.4 Social Security and Social Protection**

The International Labour Organization defines social security as 'protection against economic and social distress caused by stoppage or fall in income resulting from death, old age, sickness, employment-injury, maternity, and temporary unemployment' (ILO, 1990). Thus, social security is security that is available exclusively to a person in the labour force. Others have defined social security as a comprehensive anti-poverty package whereby social means are used to offset private deprivation (Dreze and Sen, 1995). By this view, social security is not necessarily restricted to those who are in the labour force.

Social security thus defined can be seen to consist of three categories of measures: promotional (provision of assets, skills training, primary education, healthcare); preventive (employment guarantee schemes, food subsidies under the public distribution system); and protective (minimum wages; social assistance for the old, disabled and destitutes; conventional social security measures to provide protection against old age, sickness, injury, death, and temporary unemployment) (Hirway 1997).

On all these counts, women workers fare worse than their male counterparts. Since a larger percentage of women is outside the formal sector, their access to conventional social security measures is correspondingly lower. Hardly any social security measures exist for the poor of South Asia, with the notable exception of Sri Lanka, where again the trend over the last 20 years

has been worsening. It is true that all the countries of the region have embarked on high profile anti-poverty programmes and schemes. However, these do not provide guaranteed protection against economic deprivation, whether it is endemic or random, such as that brought about by bad weather.

Macro-economic policy in the region has not been geared to the needs and priorities of the poor. Anti-poverty measures in all the countries under review have been conceptualised and designed as ad hoc additional measures to relieve the economically disadvantaged from the pressures of poverty. Since a vast majority of women live under poverty conditions and are subjected to unpredictable vagaries of fortunes - precipitated by crop failures, unemployment, price rise incumbent on macro policy changes, destruction of common property resources, etc. the vulnerability of poor women, if anything, is likely to increase. It is the poor women who bear the disproportionate brunt of destabilisation in any form (Agarwal, 1996).

None of the countries in the region has devised any comprehensive scheme to adequately protect the poorest of women against such destabilisation.

### **3.6 Demographic Factors**

Since domestic work is deemed to be the responsibility of women, it is only natural that factors such as fertility, mortality, nuptial and family structures shape the nature of women's participation in market based activities. Processes such as urbanisation and demographic transition also affect women's employment. The literature on links between women's employment structure on the one hand and demographic variables on the other is somewhat one-sided. The focus has been more on tracing the causal links between women's labour market involvement as an explanatory factor in demographic phenomena such as fertility behaviour, rather than the other way round (Presser, 1997).

Unlike in many other parts of the world, the majority of South Asian women spend their adult lives taking care of the household as well as engaging in economically productive activities, albeit at a lower recorded rate than their male counterparts.<sup>39</sup> There is hardly much evidence of withdrawal from the labour force during child bearing years, as is seen in some other parts of the world. While this is true for Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, the pattern is slightly different in Sri Lanka. The longer years spent by women in Sri Lanka in educational institutions and subsequently in market employment has resulted in a gradual increase in the age at marriage to about 25 years by the 1980s, and a reduced total fertility rate of 2.2, leading to a reduction in population growth rates even before family planning services came to be used extensively.

On the other hand, reduction in family size itself has propelled educated women in the labour force. Female literacy has been an important variable determining the nature of linkages between women's labour force participation and levels of fertility. A similar pattern can be observed within the educated segments of the female labour force in the other four countries of the region.

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<sup>39</sup> For a description of the dominant pattern of age-specific labour force participation by South Asian women and elaborations thereof, see Figure 2.1.

The only reason why this does not show up in the overall pattern of age-specific participation rates is the overwhelming weightage of unskilled, illiterate and neo-literate women in the female labour force.

Family structure is another demographic variable that plays an important role in determining the structure of employment of women. Since women are saddled with the responsibility of child care, the presence of small children in the household works as a deterrent to employment. This is more so in the non-farming sector, and where work is located outside the home, as in factory employment. In rural household and farm-based activities, there is more flexibility in work organization. Child care is often vested with older children in the household, especially girls. Among urban educated women, the presence of small children can be a deterrent to work outside the home if there are no alternative child care facilities, either at home in the form of extended family members or at work in the form of creche facilities. The traditional family structure in these societies is breaking up, and women are having to bear the dual responsibility of home management and market based work. There is an increasing burden of child care and role strain for working women in the context of unequal division of labour between men and women within the household. In Sri Lanka, where the number of migrant women workers is high, the risk of family dislocation in the absence of extended family support has been high. Psychological and material stresses and strains on account of the double burden on women are very high in the urban areas of South Asia, especially for families that are nuclear and cannot afford adequate hired domestic help.

An additional problem faced by large segments of working women in the region is the high incidence of domestic violence arising out of the internalisation of patriarchal norms promoting a presumed secondary status for women in the household. Micro studies from the region reveal that even when women are involved in full time paid employment, domestic work is rarely shared by men. Perceived lapses in domestic duties and suspicions about marital fidelity of the wife are found to be the two most common factors leading to wife battering in the region. Endemic domestic violence, or the persistent threat of such violence, can seriously delimit women's labour market involvement and options.

Yet another demographic variable which conditions women's employment is the increasing incidence of female headed and female maintained households in the subcontinent. In India, the recorded incidence of female headed households has gone up from around 8.5 per cent in 1981 to 9.5 per cent in 1991. However, the actual incidence of households which are not just formally headed by females but are also economically maintained by the earnings of adult females is much higher, if the results of several micro studies on this are to be any indication (ISST, 1996). In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, the phenomenon of male migration and desertion of women has gone up considerably in recent years. Much of it is due to increased landlessness and poverty in the region.

In Sri Lanka, female headed households were estimated to be 18.5 per cent in 1994. A recent study found that 74 per cent of the sample of female headed households had been marginalised by poverty so that the incidence of women in the sample who sought employment in order to feed their children rose from 6 per cent to 68 per cent (Pereira, 1991). Social unrest in the south of the island country during 1989-91 and the ongoing ethnic conflict in the northern and eastern

provinces have been traumatic for numerous households, many of which lost their adult male members. These families have also been victims of displacement, powerlessness and endemic violence.

Urbanisation has generally been associated with a lowering of female workforce participation in the region, primarily because the nature of work women can do in urban areas is not as flexible as in villages. Nevertheless, a large number of women from poor households in all countries of South Asia are engaged in economically productive activities that are not captured by official data gathering systems, primarily because they are largely home-based and therefore not very visible (Singh and Kelles-Vitaanen, 1987). The estimates of female work participation rates that emerge from properly drawn up micro surveys turn out to be much higher than estimates derived from macro data. A survey covering over 5,000 households in cities spread over six states of India found the margin of error in the estimate of female labour force participation rate to be very high.<sup>40</sup>

However, there is reason to believe that even with proper recording, women's work participation is likely to go down with greater urbanisation, at least in the beginning. This is because of the divergent and more inflexible nature of productive organisation in urban areas.

In general, a smaller percentage of women migrate for employment as compared to men, all over the region. This leads to the phenomenon of households that are left without adult earning male members. This pattern is rampant in the mountains and hills of Nepal, all over the terai region in India, the states of Himachal Pradesh and hills of Uttar Pradesh, again in India. In the relatively deprived regions of eastern and central India large numbers of male migrants from landless families go to work in fields and factories all over the country on a seasonal basis. These comprise the large chunk of circular migrants in the subcontinent (Mukhopadhyay, 1987).

Of late, countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India have sent hundreds and thousands of semi-skilled workers to the Gulf countries. Much of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings, especially in the 1980s, have been fuelled by remittances from abroad. To the extent such remittances are regular and reasonably substantial, these have eased the lives of women in these households. But instances of men leaving without trace are not rare. The women they leave behind have swelled the ranks of destitute women in the region. Desertion is a phenomenon which is being increasingly experienced by the women of the region.

The incidence of female international migration is also on the rise in the region. The pattern of female migration from Sri Lanka, for instance, is very much like the pattern experienced in some of the South-east Asian countries like the Philippines. There is also a large incidence of migration to the Gulf by nurses and midwives from India, especially from Kerala. These streams of migrants share the same features of relatively low skill professions and high vulnerability at the workplace.

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<sup>40</sup> The survey was carried out by the National Institute of Urban Affairs in India in 1991 and took adequate precaution to capture women's invisible economic activities in home-based production and processing. Similar results are seen in a number of micro studies conducted in all the countries of the region. See for instance, Banerjee (1985); Mukhopadhyay (1996); Manushi (1993); UNIFEM (1996).

The major link between demographic variables and women's work, however, continues to be through fertility and related factors. The general presumption has been that paid work raises status and accordingly invests the women with freer reproductive choices, hence induces lower fertility. However, paid work by itself need not necessarily invest the woman with higher status. It depends on the kind of work it is and whether or not the woman is able to retain control of her earnings. The link between women's employment and fertility is generally mediated by a host of other intervening variables.

### **3.7 Female Literacy and Implications for Women's Work**

Female literacy is seen to be a major factor that determines the status of women. UNDP's 'gender development index' uses gender differences in literacy levels as one of the three indicators of bias in gender development in a country. A number of studies have dwelt upon female literacy as a direct determinant of women's labour market involvement and her status, through a host of mediating variables. The impact of literacy on labour supply behaviour of women and men has led to studies on rates of return on education, patterns of supply behaviour, and labour demand correlates of skill acquisition and training. In particular, education as measured by years of schooling and/or degrees or diplomas obtained, is seen to operate as a market signal affecting the demand for skilled manpower. On the supply side, education and literacy are parameters determining individual labour supply functions.

For women workers in South Asia, these relationships are heavily dependent on the socio-cultural context. Most of South Asia is characterised by a certain degree of dualism in female labour supply behaviour. For the relatively affluent educated women in the subcontinent, unlike their male counterparts, paid employment is an option. For the majority of women workers, in the sub-continent, work is mainly unpaid, or poorly paid in informal sector activities. These women are also illiterate or neo-literate women. For the educated middle class women, career options are getting better. However, gender continues to play a significant role in the career prospects of educated South Asian women. As data from all the countries in the sub-continent suggest the rate of unemployment of educated women is significantly higher than that of their male counterparts.

Because female education is positively correlated with the socio-economic status of the family, it also acts as a surrogate for class. The labour force participation rates of women in India, when plotted against female literacy levels, suggest a clear U-shaped function, with lower percentages of women opting for labour market entry as one moves up the household income scale, upto a point, after which the curve turns upwards. Thus, participation rates are high among women with very low and very high levels of literacy (Acharya, 1996).

There is a steady trend towards rising female literacy in the entire region over the last couple of decades (see Appendix Tables). However, as can also be seen from these tables, in most countries of the region, the gender gap in literacy has, if anything, marginally widened in recent years. The scene is particularly depressing for rural females. For instance, in India, the literacy level in 1991 was a low of 30 per cent of the total population, and for those in the older age groups, it was even lower. Only 14 per cent of rural females in India in the 35+ age group were



found to be literate in 1991. The scene in Nepal and Pakistan is even more bleak. Although the gross enrolment rate for girls has steadily gone up over the years, dropout rates for girls at all stages are higher than boys and have remained so over the years.

Sri Lanka has by far the highest literacy levels for women in the subcontinent. This has been brought about by expanding the schooling system in the 1950s. The social welfare package introduced in the 1940s provided for community health services and subsidised food. The overall effect was a sharp decline in preventable mortality from communicable diseases, maternal mortality and infant mortality.

The demand for educated women workers has not kept pace with the rise in literacy levels of women in Sri Lanka. The recorded unemployment rates among educated women in Sri Lanka are exceptionally high. In modern industry, women are virtually excluded from employment in high technology tasks, both within and outside the export processing zones. The kind of employment available for women is more in low wage semi-skilled and labour-intensive industries, resulting in considerable de-skilling of secondary educated women (Jayaweera, 1997).

At the same time, all over the subcontinent, there has been a trend, in recent years, towards induction of highly qualified professional women in very highly paid managerial and executive jobs. There is growing evidence of breaking the 'glass ceiling'. However, this is restricted to a very small fragment of the total workforce. The trend symbolises a reconstruction and redefinition of gender in the context of high profile employment. This is a welcome trend. However, high literacy while easing entry into restricted markets, does not necessarily eliminate gender discrimination in South Asia. This is reflected in the statistics of gender differences in unemployment rates and earnings by literacy levels from all the five countries of the region.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXISTING POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES: A REVIEW

#### 4.1 Legal Provisions and Legal Reforms

Legal reforms and legal provisions for gender justice in the region have been informed by the dual, at times contradictory compulsions of protectionism and equality. While Constitutional provisions have generally been based on the principle of equality, family law in the region has been firmly entrenched in the protectionist mould. The links between protectionism and tenets of patriarchy are not difficult to discern. The inner contradictions of a legal system whose custodian is a state machinery itself deeply entrenched in patriarchal values, have manifested themselves in outcomes that have not necessarily been beneficial to women (Kapur and Cossman, 1996). Legal struggles for economic empowerment of women have had to contend with the complex and contradictory nature of the law on the one hand and the patriarchal predisposition of the judiciary and the executive on the other (Mukhopadhyay, 1998).

##### 4.1.1 Constitutional Provisions

The Constitutions of all the five countries of South Asia prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex. Article 10, 19(1) and 28(2) of the Bangladesh Constitution ensures participation of women "in all spheres of national life" and states that "women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of state and public life".

Article 14 of the Constitution of India proclaims that the state upholds the equality of all citizens before the law. Article 15(3) empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children in order to eliminate the effects of inherited discrimination. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment and specifically prohibits discrimination in employment on grounds of sex, religion, race and caste. The Directive Principles of State Policy have specific stipulations on gender equality. Article 39 directs the state to formulate policies such that all citizens, men and women, have equal rights to adequate means of livelihood, that there is equal pay for equal work, and that the state makes provisions for ensuring just and humane conditions of work.

Clause (1) of Article II of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal states that "all citizens are equal before the eyes of law." Clause (2) of the same article states that "no discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the application of general law on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe or ideology". Clause 5 guarantees equal pay to men and women for equal work. The Constitution also provides for special provisions that may be made by law to protect or promote the interests of women (proviso to Clause 3 of Article 11). Article 114 states that for election to the House of Representatives, at least 5 per cent of the total number of candidates from any party or organization must be women.

The Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 guarantees certain fundamental rights to all citizens and declares that there shall be no discrimination under the law on the basis of sex. The Constitution further stipulates that steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life. It also proclaims that the state shall protect marriage, family, mother and child.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees equality before the law, and freedom from discrimination on grounds of sex. It also stipulates special legislation or executive action to improve the position of women. All citizens have constitutionally guaranteed freedom to join trade unions and have the freedom of association. Moreover, all citizens, irrespective of sex, have the fundamental right not to be subjected to "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" which encompasses conditions of employment. The Directive Principles of State Policy under the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka directs the state to promote universal and equal access to education, freedom from sex discrimination and create a just social and economic order.

#### **4.1.2 Limitations**

Women in all the five countries of South Asia, therefore, have constitutionally guaranteed freedom from discrimination on grounds of sex. This extends to freedom from gender discrimination in the area of work and employment as well. However, there are several provisos to the constitutional guarantees. First, the constitutional provisions are there to provide general directions to state policy. Many of them are not even justiciable. For instance, the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitutions of India and Sri Lanka are only guidelines and not legally enforceable. In Sri Lanka, fundamental rights are enforceable only against state authorities, not against private sector employers. In addition, such rights are subordinate to statutory laws which were in existence before the 1978 Sri Lankan Constitution was framed, and which may be in conflict with them. Only new legislation violating fundamental rights can be challenged in a court of law. These measures, therefore, cannot give meaningful legal protection to large sections of women industrial workers in the island country.

Second, constitutional provisions exist side by side with a set of personal or family laws which govern large areas of women's lives, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and property rights. India has no uniform civil code for women belonging to different religious groups. Women's rights in civil matters are guided by personal laws pertaining to different religious communities, which are generally biased against women. In Pakistan, the traditional family system based on segregation between men and women and their roles and responsibilities is manifested in a social dichotomy of the sexes which is reinforced by the Islamic law of the Shariat. Nepal has a body of laws consisting of the National Code, the Muluki Ain, which governs women's legal rights and which has many gender discriminatory provisions. Section (1) of the Muluki Ain, for instance, debars a daughter from inheriting family property unless she remains unmarried till the age of 35. Even if she gets her share of property after fulfilling this condition, if she marries thereafter, she has to return her share. Sri Lanka is an exception, in that there is no direct dichotomy between national labour laws and ethnic, religious or family laws that affects the rights of working women (Goonasekare, 1985).

Third, constitutional provisions are sometimes at variance with provisions stipulated in labour laws. Formal sector workers are covered by various forms of legislative protection under the

Factories Acts of the different countries. Since most women in these countries work within the informal sector, the provisions of non-discrimination on grounds of gender in labour law do not apply to these workers.

There are several international standards on gender equality which are contained in the various ILO Conventions, and the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). By the time the Fourth World Conference on Women was held at Beijing in 1995, all five countries under review had ratified CEDAW. Most of the relevant ILO Conventions have also been ratified by these countries (see Table 4.1). Setting international standards is one way of promoting a consistent value system, and ratifying such Conventions signifies commitment to a common legal culture. However, as is the case with pronouncements in national Constitutions, mere ratification of Conventions does not necessarily signify adequate implementation of the provisions of these Conventions, or vice versa. Sri Lanka, which has a better social record on women's development in the region compared to other countries, has yet to sign the ILO Convention on Discrimination in Employment (1958) and the Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities (1981). Unless combined with active promotion and monitoring, it is unlikely that mere ratification can be a catalyst for promoting gender equality. The same is true for Constitutional provisions.

#### **4.1.3 Statutory Provisions**

Labour laws in all five countries provide certain kinds of protection to all workers and specific protection to women workers, especially those working within the formal sector. Maternity benefits are provided for women factory workers and workers in large units in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Creche facilities are provided for women workers working in large units. Similarly, there are protective provisions under labour laws to prevent women from working during night shifts or subject them to excessively heavy work. The bulk of the statutory law in the subcontinent is a legacy of the British legal system. To the extent women are part of the organized workforce, they benefit from provident fund, pension and other similar social security measures. A number of these provisions are in the nature of affirmative action designed to counter special problems faced by women workers on account of their domestic responsibilities.

While formal sector laws have provided some protection to women workers through affirmative legal guarantees, the same guarantees have often worked against women's employment prospects as employers generally perceive them as additional cost burdens associated with hiring female labour. This has been cited as one reason for a gradual reduction over the years of female workers in relative and at times even absolute terms, in mines and factories in India. In some areas where female labour is preferred for a whole range of reasons but where legal protection of workers is not mandatory, for instance in low paid, informal employment in the garment sector in Bangladesh, female employment has in fact shown a substantial increase. It is clearly a trade-off between quality employment with legal coverage and quantity of employment without any.

Over 95 per cent of women workers in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan work outside the boundaries of the formal sector. Thus, a vast majority of them are deprived of the benefits of

**Table 4.1 : Relevant ILO Conventions Ratified by Different Countries of South Asia**

No.	Convention	Year	Aim	Ratifying Countries by Year of Ratification
87	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention	1948	The freely exercised rights of women and employers without distinction, to organise for the purpose of furthering and defending their interests.	Bangladesh (1972) Pakistan (1951) Sri Lanka (1995)
98	Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention	1949	Protection of workers who are exercising the right to organise, non-interference between workers' and employers' organisations, promotion of voluntary collective bargaining	Bangladesh (1972) Nepal (1996) Pakistan (1952) Sri Lanka (1972)
100	Equal Remuneration Convention	1951	Equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value.	India (1958) Nepal (1976) Sri Lanka (1993)
103	Maternity Protection (Revised) Convention	1952	To provide twelve weeks of maternity leave with entitlement to cash benefits and medical care.	Sri Lanka (1993)
111	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	1958	To promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation without discrimination based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin.	Bangladesh (1972) India (1960) Nepal (1974) Pakistan (1961)
122	Employment Policy Convention	1964	To promote full, productive and freely chosen employment.	None
141	Rural Workers' Organisations Convention	1975	Freedom of association for rural workers, encouragement of their organisations, and their participation in economic and social development.	India (1977)
156	Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention	1981	To create equality of opportunity and treatment for female and male workers with family responsibilities.	None
175	Part-Time Work Convention	1994	To ensure protection for Part-Time workers in the area of access to employment, working conditions and social security	None

Source : List of Ratifications by Convention and by Country (as on 31 December, 1996), Report III (point 20), International Labour Conference 85th Session, 1997, Geneva, ILO, p. 294; and The Fundamental Human Rights Conventions of the ILO : World Ratification Chart, South Asia ILO/SAAT, 1997.

labour laws designed for formal sector workers. Even where these laws do apply, there is a lot to be desired in the manner of their implementation. According to information supplied by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, barely 20,000 women in the year 1992 were paid maternity benefits in factories, mines and plantations taken together for the country as a whole. This, clearly, is a miniscule percentage of women who could have been prospective beneficiaries, had the coverage been wider or the implementation better (Gopalan, 1995).

Almost all countries under review have also passed legislation regarding equal remuneration for men and women for equal work. However, data provided in the Appendix clearly brings out the fact that gender discrimination in wages paid to workers of equal educational attainment is rampant in the region. Data provided by the Department of Women and Child Development in India show that, between 1990 and 1995, the number of inspections made for detected irregularities with respect to wage discrimination on grounds of sex has barely exceeded an annual average of 4,000. The number of prosecutions or convictions is far lower. This is an example of the inadequacy of the letter of the law for rectifying discriminatory practices in the absence of supporting administrative structures. While laws have been useful as deterrents to deviant behaviour, social practices continue to exert a strong influence on the pattern of women's employment.

The coverage of protective labour laws, as mentioned above, is very poor. In India, in recent years, there has been a spate of labour legislations for covering informal sector workers, deriving the mandate for legal protection directly from the Constitution. Such legislation is conspicuous by the absence of supportive implementation mechanisms.<sup>41</sup> In some cases, the legal structure itself specifies exceptions to protection provided under the law. In Bangladesh, for instance, while labour laws exempt women from night work in factories or from working overtime, exceptions are made for nurses and for women working in Export Processing Zones. In reality, women are mostly employed on casual or temporary basis and are often forced to work overtime under appalling conditions. Casual and temporary workers are not entitled to many benefits available to other workers, nor do they enjoy any security of employment (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1994).

In Sri Lanka, where legal protection of workers has been relatively better than elsewhere, women are given certain special privileges under social security legislation. For instance, a woman can claim her provident fund at the age of 50 or upon marriage if she ceases to be employed thereafter, while a man must wait until he is 55. An employee has a right to seek redressal from a legal tribunal for wrongful termination of his/her services. Even a casual worker can seek relief if it can be shown that her employment was in fact not casual but stable. Fixed term contract employees cannot obtain relief from labour tribunals if their contracts are not renewed. The Termination of Employment of Workers Act (1971) in Sri Lanka introduced a number of controls on an employer's right to retrench, which is inherent under the common law. However, recent judicial decisions in Sri Lanka have strengthened employers' right of termination.

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the diverse roots and the dual nature of legal protection for Indian workers, see Mukhopadhyay (1991).

Most of the regulations relating to working conditions and safety of women workers tend to be based on bygone British laws and are not adequate to protect workers under modern conditions. Investigations and monitoring of industrial accidents and diseases are woefully inadequate all over the region. The penalties are also minimal. Some recent legislation, for instance the one promulgated in Sri Lanka in 1994 removing the prohibition on night work for women, has been directly detrimental to women's interests. Often, regulations that do exist on paper are severely circumscribed due to inadequate enforcement structures.

One area of affirmative legal protection for women that is a virtual blank is sexual harassment at work. There is hardly any effective legal protection for women workers against sexual harassment and acts of intimidation that confront them at the workplace, except under provisions of the Penal Codes of respective countries, which date back to the British rule. The grossly inadequate provisions of existing criminal law to deal with crimes of sex in these countries virtually negate the chances of a successful prosecution.

**Box 2**

### **Increasing Poor Women's Access to Credit**

Large scale development programmes have often failed to reach the very poor, especially women in extreme poverty. Credit for self-employment designed to benefit the poorest of the poor, often does not reach through conventional channels such as commercial banks, farmers' banks or rural cooperative credit societies. For poor women, gender and poverty interact to make these structures virtually inaccessible. Usually, the organisations develop centralised bureaucracies and are too inflexible to cater to the needs and priorities of poor women. On their part, commercial banks and financial institutions prefer to concentrate on large loans because of economies in transaction costs. Also, in the absence of collaterals, the poor are not perceived to be creditworthy.

Problems like these have been instrumental in the emergence of micro credit in recent years to cater to the special needs and characteristics of poor women. Several initiatives in the area have established the credentials and viability of such projects in the region. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which provides credit to women from poor households organised into small groups, is one of the earliest experiments of the kind. The Government of India has recently set up the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) as a registered society to meet the credit needs of poor women in the informal sector. The Project Credit for Rural Women (PCRW) in Nepal has been catering to similar needs in Nepal.

An interesting example of a bank run for and by poor women is the SEWA Bank in India. It was initially started because conventional financial institutions could not, and would not, respond to the credit needs of SEWA members. Run primarily by its neo-literate members, the Bank has since grown substantially in size and now provides credit to its members, not merely to cover variable and fixed capital expenses but also for essential consumption needs, including basic medical needs.

All these initiatives have a highly accountable leadership, flexible delivery systems and innovative implementation mechanisms that are responsive to the specificities of the needs of poor women. Micro credit initiatives have helped to raise the living standards of millions of families in South Asia in recent years. Most of these are operated exclusively by, or in close collaboration with, NGOs. The micro credit movement has established a proven track record and has lent credibility to a primarily woman-led phenomenon across the South Asian region.

### **Integration of Women in Macro Development Programmes: The case of the Mahaweli Development Programme in Sri Lanka**

Much emphasis has been given to the goal of integrating women in development. As a matter of fact, women do get integrated in the development process, albeit on very unequal terms. What is required is not integration per se, but integration on the basis of equality.

The Mahaweli Development Programme in Sri Lanka has been by far the largest development programme in the island country. In spite of the explicit emphasis given in the design of the programme to the goal of poverty alleviation, reviews of the programme have invariably brought up the issue of gender insensitivity in policy planning and implementation and the generally adverse consequences for women.

While allocating land to landless settlers in the programme area, women of the household were assigned only 75 per cent of one labour unit assigned to an adult male. From the beginning, women have been perceived as housewives rather than economically productive farmers, and thus ownership of land devolved on the adult male as the head of the household. As ownership of land is critical for access to other inputs such as credit and extension services, women have been excluded from gaining access to these from the beginning by dint of the design of the project itself. By devaluing the economic role of women, the project had automatically deprived women of the knowledge and information required for modernised agriculture.

Yet it is not as if women have not benefited at all from the programme. Opportunities for work have gone up, so have incomes. But the planning process has been such that there could be no upward mobility for women from the status of manual labour. This, coupled with the erosion of women's traditional rights, had ensured that the settlement programme had the women settlers integrated in the development process on very unequal and marginalized terms.

Source: Jayaweera et al. (1994).

A breakthrough in this regard has been a recent judgement by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, whereby the Court has held that protection from sexual harassment at work is a fundamental right of women.<sup>42</sup> It is important to ensure that such protection under the law is made accessible to all women workers.

The discriminatory access to property rights of women under the personal laws of all these countries, and the social practices and norms that dictate a subordinate position for women in the household, make for a weak position for women workers engaged in self-employment activities. Bereft of ownership of property which can be used as collateral, women's creditworthiness is automatically low, creating a weaker position for women in the institutional credit market.

<sup>42</sup> Vishaka and Ors vs. State of Rajasthan, August 1997. The Court has laid down the definition of 'sexual harassment' and has made it binding on central and state governments as well as public and private sector employers to comply with its directives. For an analysis of the judgement, see *The Economic Times*, 23 October, 1997 and *The Times of India*, 4 October, 1997.



Labour laws as they stand are not discriminatory per se, but tend to become so in the process of implementation. In Nepal, Bangladesh, and India, the vast majority of women workers, being in the informal sector, are denied the benefit of formal sector legal protection. In Sri Lanka, the scope of many laws depends on executive discretion. A different range of legal controls exist for different grades of workers, such as white collar, blue collar and casual workers engaged in different areas of employment, protected or unprotected. Women are over represented in the more vulnerable sections and hence turn out to be relative losers. There is an absence of protection for women workers against occupational hazards.

Collective bargaining and unionisation is de facto denied to the vast majority of workers in the subcontinent as workers' unions hardly exist in the informal sector. There is no tradition of unionization, especially among women workers in the region. Even in a country like Sri Lanka, collective bargaining, which had once been a powerful weapon in the hands of workers, is on a steady decline, as a result of the growing effect of the liberalisation policy. Similar trends are observed in other parts of the subcontinent as well, especially in EPZs in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India.

The region under review also has the unique distinction of legislating extraordinarily harsh legal measures designed to construct and propagate gender biases. The 1979 Hudood Ordinances of Pakistan, in particular, are severely gender discriminatory (Report of the Commission of Enquiry for Women in Pakistan, 1997). Such legal provisions serve to reinforce the already severe biases against women and their employment prospects.

## **4.2 National Support Structures**

Since the UN decade for women in 1975-85, there has been a persistent demand for directing policy initiatives to suit women's needs and priorities in development. This has taken the shape of not only various programmes and projects ensuring equitable access to critical inputs, but also the integration of gender issues into the process of macro policy making. Given the central role of the state in the whole process, gender advocacy has primarily targeted state authority and public initiatives. Countries in the South Asian region have been no exception to the pattern prevalent elsewhere in the world. All the five countries under review have developed and sought to refine over time, the national machinery for integrating gender into the development process. There have been innovations in policy analysis and monitoring mechanisms, development of new methods for coordinating gender sensitive planning initiatives through focal points in line ministries, as well as through attempts at overall gender sensitisation of the national planning processes.

### **4.2.1 Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, the Department of Women's Affairs, a part of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, is the central unit in the government with a mandate for advocacy as well as programme implementation. There are a number of WID (Women in Development) focal points across sectoral ministries as well as a Women's Desk in the Planning Commission, through which the Ministry coordinates its function. Bangladesh has recently passed a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Platform For Action adopted at the 1995 World Conference on Women

at Beijing. The national machinery in Bangladesh has had a long but rather discontinuous history, tied as it has been with changes in the political environment of the country. The Department of Women's Affairs is starved for funding, with hardly 0.2 per cent of the budget for implementing its programmes. The Bangladesh National Women's Association (Jatityo Mahila Sanstha) which is somewhat better endowed, and is linked with the ruling political party, is another organisation which looks after countrywide gender advocacy and programme implementation. The line ministries have a whole range of small projects and programmes on women, mostly financed through bilateral or international sources, which run alongside much larger NGO operated programmes of similar kinds. While the institutions exist on paper, the national state machinery does not have the cutting edge (Government of Bangladesh, 1995 and 1997; Islam, 1991; Goetz, 1995; Shamim, 1997).

#### **4.2.2 India**

In India, the Department of Women and Child Development is the national focal point. As in Bangladesh, it has both an advocacy as well as an implementation role. Several line ministries too have women specific programmes and projects. The Department of Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resource Development coordinates these efforts. It has taken the initiative in developing and putting in place some innovative programmes like the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DW CRA), which provides credit and related inputs to groups of 15-20 rural women all over India. The Department has also started a nationwide credit programme for women called the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK). The Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) is designed to benefit poor women in terms of generating savings for use as variable capital. There are a number of other schemes and programmes which are run by different ministries and cater to both women and men, though some of these have separate quotas for women. The most important poverty alleviation project with a quota for women is the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) which has a 40 per cent reservation for women beneficiaries. Similarly, the largest wage employment programme in the country, i.e., the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) has shown a rising percentage of women beneficiaries over time. Programmes like the Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment (TRYSEM) run by the Ministry of Rural Development caters to both men and women. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) runs a whole range of programmes, such as the Socio-Economic Programme (SEP), Condensed Courses of Education and Vocational Training (CCE and VT) for women in various categories. Training and employment generating programmes are also run by other line ministries, such as the Labour Ministry, the Ministry of Urban Affairs, and the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment (Mukhopadhyay, 1997; Gopalan, 1995).

#### **4.2.3 Nepal**

In Nepal, the administrative machinery for gender related matters is somewhat indeterminate. The Planning Commission has a Women's Cell within the Social Service Division which is supposed to look after gender interests in development administration. Recently a new Ministry of Women and Social Welfare has been established causing a certain degree of confusion regarding the respective roles and mandates of these structures. While the new Ministry of

Women and Social Welfare is starved in terms of financial and human resources, the very placement of women's affairs under the Social Service Division of the Planning Commission reveals that in the perception of policy makers, gender issues are a part of social service. Government development programmes are implemented through various line ministries and departments, out of which only three ministries, i.e. those dealing with Local Development, Agriculture and Education have separate women's cells. The Ministries of Health and Labour have allocated one staff member each as focal points on gender, without any resources or programmes. The Women Development Division (WDD) in the Ministry of Local Development has the largest existing women's cell, with a total of 330 staff members at the centre and 292 staff members in the field (Acharya, 1997).

The largest and most innovative programmes targeted at women in Nepal relate to credit, like the programme on Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), the women component in the Small Farmers Development Project (SFDP), Micro Credit Programmes, and the Grameen Bank. Evaluations of many of these programmes have shown that the gain has been more in terms of social empowerment rather than economic benefit.

#### **4.2.4 Pakistan**

In Pakistan, a women's division was initiated in 1979 which was subsequently elevated to the level of a Ministry in 1989. The mandate for the Ministry of Women's Development is to ensure and monitor adequate representation of the needs and priorities of women in the policies, plans and programmes of various government agencies. It is, therefore, concerned with planning rather than implementation and functions at the Central level. At the provincial level, Women's Cells have been created under the Planning and Development Department. Government policies on women had concentrated on welfare and protective measures for women until the Fourth Five Year Plan. During the period 1972-76, women were made eligible for all public appointments for the first time and were recruited to the diplomatic services, foreign ministries and diplomatic missions abroad. Various proposals for looking into the legal, social and economic rights of women were considered. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-88) put up the proposal to enhance opportunities for women's gainful employment in small scale industries and suggested expansion of training facilities for women in traditional as well as non-traditional skills. The Seventh Plan (1988-93) and the Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2003) for the first time emphasized the need to change attitudes towards employment opportunities for women. Most of the training programmes targeted at women that are being run by various ministries currently, were initiated in the mid to late 1980s (UN-ESCAP, 1997; Govt. of Pakistan, 1997).

#### **4.2.5 Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, as in Bangladesh, there have been changes in the administrative mechanism for implementing the WID agenda. The Ministry of Women's Affairs which was created in 1993 and the Women's Bureau which was established in 1979 have not had effective links with the Department of National Planning. When the Ministry was established in 1993, the Women's Bureau became a part of it. Prior to the 1994 elections, the Ministry was headed by a state minister. In the post-1994 period, the post of the state minister was abolished. In March 1993, a Women's Charter was formulated with the strong involvement of women's NGOs, and accepted

by the Cabinet as a statement of government policy. Based on the recommendation of the Charter, the National Committee of Women (NCW) was established by the President of Sri Lanka in August 1993, with a large and overreaching mandate. However, the NCW has little power to carry out the functions assigned to it.

One of the major innovations in gender sensitisation through state intervention in Sri Lanka has been the establishment in the mid 1980s, of a large number of Kantha Karyia Samajas (KKS) throughout the island country in order to mobilise women at the grassroot level. Unfortunately, some 2,000 of these KKSs are languishing now for want of resources and political will (CENWOR, 1997).

While the national machinery in all these countries has remained more or less marginalised within the bureaucratic structures of the respective governments, in at least some of the countries, there is a discernible shift in focus - away from welfare orientation, towards developmental and empowering initiatives. However, the strength of these initiatives is still not adequate to make a dent in the national agenda.

### **4.3 Role of NGOs**

A significant feature of the effort to mainstream gender issues into the agenda of national governments is the acceptance of the role of NGOs as supplementary mechanisms to government initiatives. In Bangladesh, for instance, NGO presence in the area of women is much more visible and perhaps more effective than the government. A large number of these NGOs are either targeted at women or have a very strong presence of women. Women's membership of organizations such as BRAC, Proshika or Nijera kori far exceeds 50 per cent of total membership. In some initiatives, like the Grameen Bank, women's presence is way above 90 per cent. Many of the projects that are being run by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Bangladesh, or targeted projects under various line ministries are far smaller in scope and coverage as compared to the NGOs.

In India, since the Sixth Plan onwards, there has been an increasing acceptance by the government of the complementary role that NGOs can play in the delivery of anti-poverty programmes and programmes involving women. A large number of government projects are currently being channelled through NGOs. NGOs have also made their presence felt, not merely in terms of project delivery but also in designing innovative projects and programmes for women's economic empowerment. Most NGO-run projects have a component of awareness raising as well.

In Nepal, the presence of NGOs in women's development is most perceptible in the area of credit and income generating activities for poor women. In terms of coverage, however, their presence or influence is much more limited as compared to the situation in countries like Bangladesh.

Pakistan has also seen a significant rise in NGO activities in recent years. NGO initiatives such as the Agha Khan Rural Support Project or the Orangi Pilot Project, have had significant positive benefits for women. Some others like Aurat are women-oriented NGOs. These have had a checkered history of struggle and achievements as they have had to function in a relatively gender insensitive atmosphere.

Women's NGOs in Sri Lanka came into their own during the international decade for women and in subsequent phases. The contribution of women's NGOs in the country has been significant in drawing attention to the discrimination on the basis of sex that persists in various muted and overt forms in the public and private domains, even though, by and large, Sri Lanka has had a far better record of gender parity in comparison with neighbouring countries. Apart from implementing action projects, women's NGOs in Sri Lanka, as in other countries of the region, have taken active part in policy formulation and in gender research.

Apart from government bodies and non-government organisations, other agencies which could potentially act as sources of empowerment for women workers are workers' organisations and employers' organisations. Women's involvement in workers' unions is minimal in the region - much more so than men's. However, there is a growing trend towards collective action by women workers, often initiated by NGO intervention. The recently formed National Centre for Labour (NCL) in India, which is a federation of unions of unorganised sector workers, is a case in point. Many of the constituents of NCL are predominantly women's organisations.

If organisational initiatives among women workers are few and far between in the region, the presence of employers' organisation is even more rare. Apart from some isolated instances of Women Entrepreneurs' Forums, such structures are conspicuous by their absence.

#### **4.4 A Review of Existing Policies and Programmes**

The record of intent, if not practice, of the existing framework of countervailing policies and programmes for eliminating gender discrimination in employment in South Asia, is quite impressive. The national governments of all five countries under review have constitutionally guaranteed equality for men and women, some of them specifically providing for non-discrimination in the area of work and employment. Almost all countries have statutory legal provisions in one form or another against gender discrimination in employment. Labour laws of all countries cover all workers irrespective of sex. Thus, benefits of provident fund, pension, accident/injury in the workplace, devolve to all workers covered by law, irrespective of sex. Special protective measures for women, such as maternity benefits, crèche facilities for women working in large establishments, prohibition against night shifts, are also universal for specific categories of women workers. All the countries under review have ratified the provisions of Conventions on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The United Nations Decade for Women (1975-85) set forth various national initiatives for setting up special administrative structures with a view to put in place women's interests and priorities in the fabric of national policy making in all spheres, including the sphere of work. The national machineries for integrating women's issues in mainstream policy making have been operational in all the countries for a couple of decades now. A large number of programmes and projects specifically designed to target women beneficiaries have also been in existence in the region for a long time. A significant force behind this process has been the pressure generated by the international development community supplemented, in various measures in the different countries, by the women's movement and the fraternity of gender sensitive NGOs which has been gaining strength over the years.

### **Doing it Herself: Technology Sustaining Women's Creative Potentials**

The membership profile in the milk cooperatives under the programme of Operation Flood in India has been predominantly male. Originally women constituted barely 15 per cent of the total number of members of these dairy cooperatives, in spite of the fact that most of the work in the dairy sector is done by women. By one estimate, for every male involved in dairy operations, there are fifteen women who do the work. But field studies have shown that when dairying becomes commercialized, control goes over to men.

The Department of Women and Child Development in India has recently started some all-woman dairy cooperatives in four states of India. It has been found that the performance of some of these 1,000 odd dairy cooperatives designed exclusively for women is significantly more satisfactory than that in the mixed dairy cooperatives. Women in these cooperatives have readily and successfully gone in for technical training and have actively participated in the management of the cooperatives. Similar experiments in training of women entrepreneurs in fish processing and preservation, in handloom technology, textile chemistry and sericulture technology has been initiated with significant degrees of success in the region.

Time and again, poor women workers have proved that if skills and technology have eluded them, the fault lies more with the design and planning of programmes than with their own creative and adaptive capacities. A project designed to document indigenous process and product innovations by poor women workers across the subcontinent, came up with a whole range of very imaginative practices developed by poor women workers in various activities, such as land reclamation and paddy processing in Bangladesh, carpet making in Nepal, manual silk reeling in India and coir making and food processing in Sri Lanka.

The challenge before the governments is to design programmes that set aside gender stereotypes and ensure that the creative potential of women workers gets the requisite support and opportunity to realize itself.

Source: Helen Appleton (ed.), *Do It Herself*, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995.

Despite all these efforts, the conditions of women's employment in this region appear unchanged for the most part. While there are signs of increased participation of women in the workforce in the region, the conditions of employment do not seem to have changed for the better in any substantive way. Also, gender differences in employment structures, be it in terms of industrial or occupational distribution, or distribution by labour status categories, seem to have in fact worsened in some cases over the years. Evidence suggests that the practice of equal pay for equal work exists more as an exception than as a rule in the region. While a small section of the female workforce has been able to break the proverbial glass ceiling, their weight in the total female workforce continues to be minuscule.

Does all this constitute proof of the failure of the national machinery to ensure the advancement of women? It is difficult to evaluate a set of policies and programmes or an institutional structure

in the absence of clear cut counterfactuals. However, judging by the trends in the patterns and conditions of employment of the majority of women workers in South Asia, one can legitimately say that the existing set of policies and programmes have failed to deliver the goods.

The reasons are not far to seek. Women's employment in South Asia is determined by the overriding influence of poverty and economic deprivation of the population on the one hand, and the continuing stranglehold of patriarchy on the other. These two factors have interacted with each other to shape the structure and conditions of women's employment in the region. Constitutional guarantees of gender equality provide, at best, a general intent of state policy. Statutory provisions of labour laws are equally inadequate for the simple reason that the huge majority of women workers, 95 per cent in India for instance, work outside the purview of protective labour legislation designed for formal sector workers. Labour laws that are applicable on paper to the entire workforce, including the informal sector workforce, are for the most part pious promises, given the absence of any adequate implementation mechanism.

The national machinery developed in the countries of the region over the last couple of decades has been starved of staff, skills and funding. Whether they are women's cells within the national planning commissions or departments within various line ministries, or designed as separate ministries for Women's Affairs, these structures have been systematically marginalised within the mainstream policy making framework. The institutional structure of the national machinery, in many cases, has undergone changes over the years. In all cases, these have stayed as ad hoc structures, without much clout or backing within mainline bureaucratic hierarchies. In some countries like Bangladesh, the clout of the national machinery has dramatically waxed and waned, depending on the political inclination of the national government in power (Kabeer 1991; Goetz 1995). In Pakistan, it was during the Prime Ministership of Zia-UI-Haq in the 1970s that the Hudood Ordinances were promulgated, with their extraordinarily repressive implications for women (COI of Pakistan, 1997). In Nepal, the newly created Ministry of Women's Affairs has neither the resources nor the power to influence policy making at the national level (Acharya, 1996).

The extraordinarily large number of projects and programmes targeted at women in all these countries have not been able to make a significant dent primarily because of their limited scope and their uncoordinated design and implementation structure. Funding for most of these projects has come from the international development community, channeled through various line ministries in these countries. These are highly bureaucratized and the need for coordination of similar or related projects has been subverted.

The potential links between state sponsored programmes in the area of women's employment and the priorities and interests of women in civil society have, in most cases, been overlooked. For instance, although Bangladesh has a very large and overarching NGO presence in the area of gender sensitive action, the interface of such initiatives with the government's programmes and policies has, at best, been minimal. The same is true of the government-NGO collaboration in Pakistan and Nepal. In India, the situation may be improving, but still has a long way to go. By and large, the policy domain is out of bounds to civil society initiatives in the entire region.

While managerial improvements are in order, much of the malaise stems from deep-rooted factors. If one were to categorise broad reasons for these inadequacies, one could perhaps put them into two groups. One set of factors relates to the inadequacies in the design, implementation, and coverage of targeted interventions. The second pertains to the power of patriarchal norms and values in South Asian society in shaping women's employment patterns and opportunities in the region.

The inadequacies in the design, implementation and coverage of these programmes can, in turn, be linked to a number of factors. Many of the affirmative action programmes in the region, such as credit programmes for women, seek to address women's economic vulnerability through single dimensional strategies. A large number of credit and training programmes fail to locate such vulnerability within the overall context of women's life situations. Since the vulnerability of poor women is multi-dimensional in nature, it calls for corresponding multi-faceted, integrated strategies. Women's participation in the Employment Guarantee Schemes in India improved significantly when child care facilities were provided alongside wage employment.

The mushrooming of programmes and policies for women's economic empowerment, often as a response to external compulsions, has led to a situation of uncoordinated and ad hoc growth of projects, without proper contextualization and integration within a larger framework. Monitoring is usually done in terms of targets achieved, or funds disbursed, with virtually no assessment of qualitative aspects of project delivery. Problems are usually compounded by unimaginative, unmotivated and gender biased bureaucratic hierarchies.

The strength of patriarchal values and norms in South Asian society also needs to be countered in the design of action programmes and policies. Policies that turn a blind eye to women's roles and responsibilities in the domestic sphere and are restricted to designing supplementary "income earning opportunities" for women, normally end up increasing the workload of women, without ensuring control over the additional income they earn. The situation is exacerbated by conditions of endemic poverty and socio-economic deprivation in the household. Unless these basic characteristics of women's lives are confronted, the question of providing better jobs for women in South Asia may remain a pipe dream.



## CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND AN ALTERNATIVE AGENDA FOR ACTION

### 5.1 Summary of Conclusions

Evidence from the five countries covered by the study reveals certain significant facts.

- Despite low recorded participation rates, the average woman in South Asia 'works' for longer hours than her male counterpart. This fact does not show up in the data which are often incomplete, and also because domestic work, which is primarily a woman's responsibility, is not deemed as 'productive' work.
- Gender based division of roles, responsibilities and functions is the result of a systematic socialisation process in South Asia. Domestic work and home management are considered primarily women's responsibility, and men's participation in household work is minimal. Although women take part in 'productive' economic activities, the nature of their involvement in the labour market is structurally very different from men's. Women continue to be stuck at the bottom rungs of the job market in terms of earnings, regularity of employment, job security and other such indicators of the quality of work.
- The nature of economically productive work women do varies widely across cultures. There is evidence to show that women can and do take up new types of productive activities when circumstances so demand.
- Changes in women's work patterns occur as a result of socio-economic changes. As women are rarely the decision makers, even when they do benefit in real terms from such changes, it is more in the form of a side effect, rather than as a result of efforts designed to benefit women directly.
- Women workers are displaced first due to technological changes - whether in agriculture, in the handloom industry, or in factories. Mechanisation normally affects operations that can be done mechanically, and/or operations that are repetitive and arduous - precisely the kind of work women are assigned; while technologically upgraded operations tend to get usurped by men.
- There are signs of a changing mind set, especially in regard to a small but growing elite of professional women who are entering the top end of the job market in recent years. But as yet they constitute a small fraction of the female workforce.
- A rigid framework of social roles and a highly hierarchical social structure have both worked against women's economic interests in the region.
- Concerted efforts are needed to usher in changes in patterns of women's employment in the region. A two-pronged strategy, whereby state initiatives forge links with civil society, will bring about a changed regime.

## **5.2 A Alternative Agenda for Action**

The impediments to women's economic empowerment in South Asia can be put under two broad heads. The first relates to the strong and unrelenting hold of patriarchy on society, which, coupled with conditions of endemic poverty, creates problems of job accessibility for women. The second pertains to weaknesses in the design, monitoring and implementation of specific policies and programmes aimed at women, and the marginalisation of such policies in the overall macro-economic scenario.

It is essential that programmes and policies are conceived in the context of the overall development of women's life situation. Unless reinforced by supplementary strategies in areas such as community participation for poverty alleviation, education, health and nutrition, policies related to employment alone are likely to backfire, especially where poor women are concerned. It is therefore important to develop an integrated strategy of empowerment, building on the complementarity of project initiatives in different areas.

Programmes must also be flexible and innovative when policies backfire as in the case of maternity benefits which have adversely affected prospects of employment in protected jobs for women workers. An innovative response to this problem could be an incentive scheme whereby the additional cost of protection is shared between the government and the employer. Similar schemes can be designed for promoting female employment in non-traditional sectors.

Designing such innovations in policy planning presupposes close monitoring of market signals on a regular basis, necessitating not merely a responsive and informed policy planning network but also an adequate database reflecting the actual state of affairs.

To address these issues, elements of a new agenda for action are proposed in the following sections. The proposal is divided into two groups: one that addresses broad general issues, and a second that involves specific measures.

### **5.2.1 General Recommendations**

#### ***(i) Need for a Transformative Policy Framework***

For the large majority of women in South Asia, a major constraint is patriarchal subordination. This colours the capabilities and attainments of women in all phases of their life cycle. Policies designed to improve the employment potential of women must necessarily understand this constraint. Employment generation should be looked upon not merely as a potent instrument for poverty alleviation but also as a transformative mechanism to achieve a gender balance in society. In concrete terms, this means that employment of women has to be seen as inextricably linked to other labouring activities of women outside the labour market.

#### ***(ii) People-centred Macro Policies***

*Macro-economic policy in the region has, to date, not been genuinely people-centred.* The commitment of the national governments towards providing basic needs of the people has been far from adequate. Feminists have argued that macro-economic policy, especially reforms under structural adjustment, have been biased against women, and that the effects of structural adjustment programmes have turned out to be both anti-poor and anti-women.

### **Innovative Alternatives for Unprotected Women**

With increasingly flexible employment arrangements and the proliferation of the informal sector, it can be expected that more and more women workers will not be covered by standard labour legislation and will not be entitled to social guarantees by the State or formal employment institutions covering minimal terms and conditions of work and social security coverage. At the minimum, the need is for social safety nets, especially in the countries in transition, to protect the socially excluded from the most adverse impacts of the economic reforms. Beyond this minimum, the challenge is to find *innovative and effective alternatives for the protection and organization of women workers* in various types of vulnerable situations. In the region, efforts have focussed on group mobilization and organization of vulnerable women for empowerment vis-à-vis other established structures, to promote awareness and legal literacy, to improve access to institutionalized credit, to mobilize savings and establish common funds as non-conventional forms of social protection against contingencies, and to supplement formal enforcement mechanisms or labour inspection services.

Source: *Gender Issues in the World of Work: Briefing Kit*, ILO, Geneva, 1995.

There is a dire necessity to turn the direction of policy making and put people at the central core. In particular, to the extent poverty and gender discrimination are the two major economic and social problems plaguing this region, poor people in general, and poor women in particular, should form the core concern of macro policy. This should be translated into a higher resource allocation and redesigning of macro policies to focus on disadvantaged groups, not merely in the area of employment but also in fulfilling basic needs of the people. Unfortunately, these are precisely the areas which have remained deprived in years of planning and policy making in the region.

#### ***(iii) Provision of a National Machinery for Women's Advancement***

The institutional mechanism designed to ensure gender sensitive policy planning within the governments needs *to be strengthened in terms of staff, skill and funding* in all the countries of the region. It is important to reinforce these initiatives so that they are not marginalised within bureaucratic structures. The institutions to date operate as ad hoc structures, and unless endowed with the requisite power and resources, are unlikely to make a dent in transforming policy making in these countries.

#### ***(iv) Better Coordination***

A review of policies and programmes in all the countries of the region shows a clear absence of linkage between professed policy pronouncements and actual action on the ground. A multitude of projects and schemes are being run for women through different bureaucratic structures pertaining to different line ministries. There has to be much better and more effective coordination of such initiatives. This has to be coupled with accountability in programme delivery, in order to ensure that together they add up to policy pronouncements.

**(v) Action Programmes**

Affirmative action programmes and policies designed to empower women must be sustained until these generate improvements in women's conditions. These need to be properly situated and tied up with similar programmes across different sectors, for better results.

**(vi) Local Structures**

Countries such as India, Nepal, and Bangladesh have recently launched massive programmes of local self governance. In India, one-third of the elected seats in local 'panchayat' bodies are reserved for women. *Such structures need to be utilised adequately for articulation of the needs and priorities of women in all areas, including the area of employment, and for ensuring proper delivery of services* such as credit through institutional sources. These structures may also be used for the dissemination of local labour market information for both men and women.

**(vii) NGO Involvement**

*There is an urgent need to explore the potential of NGOs in terms of flexibility and outreach to women at the grassroots as complementary to government initiatives in improving women's employment opportunities.* While some links have indeed been forged between the state machinery and NGOs in all the countries of the region, these need to be substantially strengthened. There is also a need for a better understanding of NGO-government partnerships and a sharing of common goals. NGOs can be involved not merely in implementing official programmes, but also in the designing of programmes, monitoring them on the ground and evolving a more transformative policy package for women's empowerment.

**(viii) Group Formation**

Many government programmes of late have started utilising women's groups for the delivery of services at the grassroots. These groups could be existing Mahila Mandals or groups specifically designed for delivery of programmes such as DWCRA in India or Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Women's groups may be looked upon as intermediate structures that may be profitably utilised for tying up individual women with structures of local governance like panchayats at the village level. Such innovative mechanisms for forging links between the community and the government may be tried out on a broad-based scale to address the problems of atomisation and invisibility that characterise the majority of women workers in the region.

**(ix) Involving the Family**

Since the basis of unequal gender relations can be traced to the family, *it is imperative that programmes targeted at women also involve men in the family* throughout the process of initiation and implementation. Without adequate awareness raising within the family, provision of additional employment opportunities to women might only result in increased workloads for women, without corresponding compensation.

**(x) A Holistic View**

Finally, productive work for the majority of women in South Asia is only a part of a continuum of labouring activities undertaken by women for the maintenance and survival of the family. In designing policy for the so-called 'productive' activities undertaken by women, a holistic view needs to be taken of women's work in its totality.

## **5.2.2 Specific Recommendations**

### ***(i) Gender Sensitisation***

Gender sensitisation must be made an integral part of all regular training programmes *for all public officials*. People from all levels of bureaucracy, judiciary, law enforcement agencies and public sector units must go through these courses. Textbooks from the primary level upwards need to be reviewed and redrafted to eliminate material that reflects gender bias and to promote ideas of gender equality.

### ***(ii) Strengthening of National Machinery***

More resources need to be committed to strengthen the national machinery for women's empowerment in all countries of the region. This has to be in terms of increases in *staff strength, skills* and as well as *financial resources*. Each country must establish or invest existing National Women's Commissions with adequate power and clout to deal with gender bias in structures of governance.

### ***(iii) Gender Audit***

All major public programmes and schemes must go through a compulsory gender audit. No schemes should be passed unless a clearance is obtained through such audit.

### ***(iv) Monitoring of Recruitment Practices***

A systematic monitoring of recruitment practices to rule out gender discrimination in hiring should be made a regular feature of labour inspections. The system of inspection for monitoring gender discrimination in wages also needs to be strengthened.

### ***(v) Generating Better Data***

Greater emphasis must be placed on generating better and more inclusive data on women's employment in the region. Regular gender training of investigators must be a continuous feature of Census and Survey Enumerators' Training Programmes.

### ***(vi) Legislation for Protection Against Sexual Harassment at Work***

Fear of sexual harassment at work which is a major deterrent to women's access to employment opportunities must be addressed by comprehensive legislation and supportive implementation structures.

### ***(vii) Developing Alternative Structures of Social Security and Social Protection***

Since most women workers in the region work outside the ambit of the formal sector, innovative social security systems must be developed in the region, building on NGO experience, traditional social protection networks and women's organisations.

Apart from these, governments can encourage the private sector to introduce schemes to employ women in non-traditional sectors and to provide them full legal protection in terms of gender-sensitive affirmative action. Examples of such schemes are as follows:

### ***(viii) Incentives for Non-Traditional Employment for Women***

Governments could provide tax incentives or subsidies to private sector producers for providing non-traditional employment to women.

***(ix) Public Provision of Costs of Affirmative Legislation***

Governments could bear, partially or fully, the enhanced labour cost to private producers of employing female labour, in terms of provision of maternity benefits, crèche facilities, etc. to mitigate the adverse impacts of female employment.

Steps may have already been taken in the countries of the region along some of the lines suggested above. What is needed is to bridge the gaps in the structure and invest it with more power. Links with civil society and non-governmental organisations need strengthening. The entire agenda has to be built upon a clear understanding of the perception of a secondary status accorded to women in a strongly hierarchical and patriarchal society.

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## **Statistical Appendix**



Contd...

**TABLE A.8: Ratio of Revenue Generated to Wages**

Year	ARPW30	ARPW31	ARPW32	ARPW33	ARPW34	ARPW35	ARPW37	ARPW38	ARPW40	ARPWALL
1973	19.65	30.99	12.86	14.05	13.76	13.23	9.68	7.16	12.73	12.17
1974	41.87	37.97	13.16	16.68	15.80	14.29	9.93	7.23	13.84	14.85
1975	39.99	31.73	12.00	14.38	13.79	13.31	9.39	8.07	11.81	14.01
1976	46.91	31.82	12.34	14.70	13.28	14.16	10.73	8.83	11.25	14.10
1977	51.64	36.31	13.74	16.00	13.61	14.80	11.03	9.17	9.53	15.31
1978	44.00	27.81	11.28	15.82	12.72	13.46	9.82	9.75	9.04	14.87
1979	43.74	26.12	10.83	14.37	12.30	13.28	8.61	9.69	9.10	13.59
1980	52.43	25.82	11.06	16.19	12.18	14.80	8.80	10.38	9.61	13.26
1981	63.05	27.69	11.63	17.43	13.64	15.73	9.06	11.79	10.70	15.33
1982	62.21	27.76	12.23	18.05	14.46	15.61	9.50	12.14	10.15	16.11
1983	61.69	29.39	12.04	16.33	12.89	15.04	9.85	13.44	12.48	15.94
1984	61.41	28.63	12.76	14.80	11.82	15.89	10.11	14.92	10.70	15.62
1985	75.67	28.11	13.95	16.05	12.87	15.90	10.24	18.53	10.84	17.05
1986	65.37	29.82	14.81	17.46	13.28	17.61	11.14	14.99	11.77	17.97
1987	70.89	29.24	15.93	18.27	15.03	19.28	11.70	18.22	11.15	18.54
1988	72.94	29.91	18.10	19.84	13.90	19.81	12.76	17.83	10.21	19.27
1989	69.46	33.47	18.54	21.71	14.93	21.32	13.95	25.20	10.88	20.01
1990	76.52	36.05	20.59	24.52	14.69	22.33	15.80	26.26	12.40	21.65
1991	57.73	42.48	21.64	33.43	16.45	22.11	13.74	30.88	21.08	23.72
1992	63.85	43.67	20.94	33.63	14.62	22.84	16.84	36.76	16.32	23.30
1993	67.21	48.72	20.39	28.93	17.85	22.80	18.58	40.65	20.98	25.67

Note: The variable ARPW is revenue generated per every rupee spent on wages, at 1981-82 prices ( $=\{GO/WPI\}/\{WGE/CPI\}$ ). The code for the machinery industry (356) has been abbreviated to 35.

Calculations are made after the numerator and denominator have been adjusted to 1981-82 prices.

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- SL6 : Senior Officials, Managers and Professionals by Sector and Sex, 1990.

**Table B 1 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Population, 1974-96, Bangladesh**

Year	Total Population (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
<b>Census</b>						
1974*	76.40	39.79	36.61	920	2.06	2.67
1981*	89.90	45.89	44.01	959	2.03	2.03
1991*	109.90	56.10	53.80	959		
<b>LFS</b>						
1984-85**	97.80	49.90	47.90	960	3.22	3.54
1985-86**	101.10	51.50	49.60	963	2.32	1.52
1989**	108.10	55.81	52.29	937	1.68	2.03
1995-96***	121.80	62.21	59.59	95		

Note : Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males.

Source : \* *Women and Men in Bangladesh : Facts and Figures, 1970-90*, Ministry of Planning, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, July 1994, p. 7.

\*\* *Women in Bangladesh : Equality, Development and Peace*, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, 1995, p. 50.

\*\*\* *Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, December 1996.

**Table B 2 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Labour Force, 1989-96, Bangladesh (Extended definition)**

Year	Total Labour Force (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
1989	50.7	29.70	21.00	707	3.13	* -2.89
1990-91	51.2	31.11	20.09	646	2.21	1.18
1995-96	56.0	34.70	21.30	614		

\* Denotes decrease

Source : *Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, December 1996, Table 6.23, p. 80.

Table B 3 : Labour Force Participation Rates by Age Group and Sex, 1995-96, Bangladesh

%

Age Group (years)	Usual Definition			Extended Definition		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Total	48.3	84.6	18.1	64.8	78.3	50.6
10-14	33.3	37.7	28.3	33.3	37.7	28.3
15-19	41.7	61.3	18.0	57.5	65.5	47.8
20-24	43.5	78.8	15.8	68.9	82.0	58.7
25-29	50.2	93.5	16.0	75.9	95.5	60.4
30-34	55.4	98.3	15.8	79.8	99.2	61.9
35-39	59.9	98.4	18.2	81.4	99.3	62.0
40-44	62.3	99.0	17.0	81.9	99.2	60.4
45-49	60.9	98.8	14.3	81.1	99.2	58.9
50-54	57.4	98.0	14.3	78.4	98.4	57.1
55-59	57.9	96.1	14.4	74.6	96.6	49.6
60-64	55.2	88.6	11.4	68.2	88.4	41.0

Source : Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, December 1996, pp. 29 and 37.

Table B 4 : Unemployment Rates for Persons (15 Years and Above) by Education, Sex and Residence, 1995-96, Bangladesh

%

Level of Education	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Total	2.5	2.5	2.2	4.4	4.4	4.3	2.1	2.2	1.9
No Schooling	0.7	0.7	0.8	1.5	1.5	1.6	0.6	0.5	0.7
Class I - V	1.5	1.5	1.7	3.0	2.9	3.1	1.2	1.0	1.6
Class VI - VIII	3.9	3.9	4.0	5.5	5.1	6.8	3.4	3.4	3.5
Class IX - X	8.3	8.3	11.1	7.8	7.7	8.4	8.5	7.2	11.8
SSC/HSC & Equivalent	10.3	10.3	12.9	7.9	7.8	8.8	11.8	10.9	15.1
Degree & Above	9.3	9.3	15.3	7.4	6.0	15.3	12.7	12.7	15.4

Source : Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, December 1996, p. 113.

Table B 5 : Underemployed Persons and Underemployment Rates (10 Years and Above) by Sex and Residence, 1995-96, Bangladesh

(million)

Category	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Employed persons	54.6	33.8	20.8	9.7	7.0	2.7	44.8	26.7	18.1
Employed persons (<35 hr/weekly)	18.9	4.2	14.7	1.9	0.7	1.2	17.0	3.5	13.5
Underemployment rate (a)	34.6	12.4	70.7	19.6	10.0	44.4	37.9	13.1	74.6

Note : (a) Those who worked less than 35 hours per week as percentage of the total number of employed population.

Source : Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, December 1996, p. 65.

**Table B 6: Average Monthly Pay and Daily Work Hours by Type of Employment in an Urban Area, 1991, Bangladesh**

Type of Employment	Average Daily Working Hours		Average Monthly Income (Taka)		F/M WR in Per Cent Per Unit of Time
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Professional	5.4	7.6	2,054	3,988	72.4
Public sector service	8.1	8.6	2,378	4,145	60.9
Private sector service	8.0	9.8	3,706	5,881	77.2
Bank/Other Inst.	8.0	9.8	2,337	7,075	40.4
Business	4.7	9.5	2,331	10,731	43.9
Business own home	3.7	5.0	943	2,110	60.3
Factory	10.6	9.2	885	3,708	20.6
Day Labour	7.3	9.9	665	2,823	31.9
Skilled Labour	—	11.0	—	3,510	—
Domestic service	9.4	8.1	589	1,141	44.4
All types	9.9	9.3	1,321	4,620	26.8

Note : F/M WR - Female/Male Wage Ratio.

Source : Women and Men in Bangladesh : Facts and Figures, 1970-90, Ministry of Planning, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Bangladesh, 1994, p. 64.

**Table B 7 : Percentage Distribution of Wage and Salaried Employees (15 Years and Above) by Weekly Income, Sex and Residence, 1995-96, Bangladesh**

Weekly Income (in Tk.)	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
1-250	21.5	11.8	51.6	16.8	6.9	44.0	26.5	16.8	61.6
251-500	32.2	33.8	27.0	30.6	30.9	29.9	33.8	36.8	23.1
501-750	17.3	19.8	9.3	17.0	19.7	9.5	17.7	20.0	9.2
751-850	5.0	5.7	2.6	4.4	5.0	2.7	5.5	6.4	2.5
851-950	2.7	3.0	1.8	2.7	3.0	1.9	2.8	3.0	1.8
951-1,050	6.0	7.1	2.8	7.6	8.7	4.7	4.3	5.4	0.3
1,051-1,150	0.7	0.9	0.1	0.8	0.9	0.2	0.6	0.8	
1,151+	14.6	17.8	4.7	20.1	24.8	7.1	8.7	10.7	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Totals may not add up to 100 because of rounding off.

Source : Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, December 1996, p. 139.

**Table B 8 : Reported and de facto Rural Female Headed Households by Size of Cultivated Land, 1988, Bangladesh**

%

Size of Cultivated Land (acres)	Reported Female headed Households	De facto Female headed Households	Total Female headed Households
Landless	25.0	8.5	33.5
0.01- 0.04	16.9	7.8	25.6
0.05-0.24	17.5	13.0	30.5
0.25-0.49	15.0	12.7	27.7
0.50-0.99	10.7	8.7	19.4
1.00-2.49	7.8	6.5	14.3
2.50+	4.9	3.7	8.6
All sizes	15.1	9.4	24.5

Note: The percentage of de facto female headed households was calculated on the basis of rural households with migrant husbands in which wives take agricultural decisions.

Source : Women and Men in Bangladesh : Facts and Figures, 1970-90, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, July 1994, p. 13. Original data taken from Agricultural Sector Review: Women's Roles in Agriculture, UNDP and UNIFEM, Dhaka, 1989.

**Table I 1 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Population, 1951-91, India**

Year	Total Population (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio Average	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Growth Rate (Female)
1951	361.0	185.51	175.49	946	2.01	1.95
1961	439.2	226.28	212.92	941	2.30	2.18
1971	548.1	283.99	264.11	930	2.21	2.25
1981*	683.3	353.49	329.81	933	2.19	2.13
1991**	846.3	439.18	407.12	927		

Note : Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males.

\* The 1981 Census was not held in Assam. The figures for 1981 include the interpolated population of Assam.

\*\* The 1991 Census was not held in Jammu & Kashmir. The figures for 1991 include the population of Jammu & Kashmir as projected by the Standing Committee of Experts on Population Projections (October, 1989).

Source : Census of India 1991. Series-1 India, Paper-2 of 1992. Final Population Totals : Brief Analysis of Primary Census Abstract. Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

Table I 2 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Labour Force, India

Year	Total Labour Force (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
<b>Employment and Unemployment Survey</b>						
1972-73	240.2	161.42	78.78	488	2.86	3.97
1977-78	281.6	185.87	95.73	515	1.90	1.57
1983	310.4	206.11	104.29	506	1.82	1.37
1987-88	334.4	223.53	110.87	496	2.13	1.62
1993-94	379.5	256.42	123.08	480		
<b>Census</b>						
1971	186.4	149.72	36.68	245	2.20	5.94
1981	251.5	186.16	65.34	351	1.88	3.22
1991	314.1	224.36	89.74	400		

Source : Key Results on Employment and Unemployment, 50th Round, NSSO, Department of Statistics, Government of India, Table 41.2, p 17 and Censuses 1971, 1981 and 1991.



Table I 3 : Female Wage Rates (Rs. per day) and Female / Male Wage Ratio by Industrial Divisions and Educational Categories, 1993-94 - Rural India

Industry Division	Educational Categories									
	Not Literate		Literate & up to Middle		Secondary		Graduate & Above		All	
	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)
Agriculture (0)	20.97	97.22	25.47	95.68	40.07	69.49	63.95	84.14	22.83	83.11
Mining and quarrying (1)	44.12	62.25	20.57	27.37	38.60	43.24	—	—	41.28	54.32
Manufacturing (2)	15.50	53.45	17.40	47.62	25.80	49.88	—	—	17.11	43.14
Manufacturing (3)	21.34	50.06	19.44	36.64	58.23	97.02	42.86	46.82	33.41	58.34
Electricity, gas and water (4)	48.93	73.57	0.86	1.18	71.64	86.75	—	—	62.00	80.48
Construction (5)	25.32	60.27	54.87	111.84	124.85	123.87	100.53	94.93	68.57	109.84
Trade (6)	15.51	65.80	35.51	117.08	29.70	97.38	51.71	124.36	29.02	96.99
Transport & Storage, etc. (7)	—	—	34.76	64.69	71.82	99.89	—	—	46.44	78.71
Services (8)	3.33	13.58	32.14	61.28	54.85	66.30	90.20	86.38	63.85	71.76
Services (9)	14.14	37.34	25.89	52.30	60.64	76.84	73.56	73.26	43.30	59.24
All	17.98	57.50	23.92	52.15	57.61	79.67	72.16	73.85	34.89	59.66
Sample Persons	489	34.58	352	11.34	549	17.72	231	14.41	1621	17.59

Note : FWR : Female Wage Rate, F/M W (%) : Female Wage Rate as a percentage of corresponding Male Wage Rate. Wage / Salary earnings pertain to regular wage/salaried employees in 15-59 year age groups.

Source : Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94, 50th Round, National Sample Survey Organization, Department of Statistics, Government of India, Report No. 409, Table 55, pp. A 306-7 and A 309-10.

Table I 4 : Female Wage Rates (Rs. per day) and Female/Male Wage Ratio by Industrial Division and Educational Categories, 1993-94 - Urban India

Industry Division	Educational Categories											
	Not Literate		Literate & up to Middle		Secondary		Graduate & Above		All			
	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)	(FWR)	F/M W (%)		
Agriculture (0)	29.83	91.95	35.59	89.35	99.95	114.16	113.67	92.93	46.66	90.78		
Mining and quarrying (1)	61.92	77.05	18.68	22.76	79.87	82.59	95.02	67.84	64.11	67.78		
Manufacturing (2)	19.67	46.56	25.38	51.52	33.85	54.71	95.88	88.52	30.00	53.01		
Manufacturing (3)	31.62	68.34	28.03	50.32	57.16	70.57	106.72	78.64	58.47	75.11		
Electricity, gas and water (4)	27.20	44.18	—	—	85.90	79.50	118.40	86.89	89.42	89.27		
Construction (5)	24.31	46.01	25.82	59.74	93.62	106.88	60.90	47.66	38.22	54.09		
Trade (6)	18.55	59.30	30.08	87.11	43.77	89.00	75.11	85.67	43.08	99.49		
Transport & storage etc. (7)	61.57	117.01	45.36	75.12	81.86	94.94	92.42	84.49	77.01	103.69		
Services (8)	20.64	48.24	34.54	60.04	68.11	74.50	122.85	80.37	105.35	84.29		
Services (9)	25.49	56.64	30.97	54.95	75.12	88.24	94.68	76.09	63.07	72.03		
All	26.75	57.80	30.11	56.79	70.93	88.30	98.59	77.21	62.31	79.76		
Sample Pers.	775.00	42.63	754.00	9.83	1245.00	18.04	549.00	27.16	4323.00	19.57		

Note : FWR : Female Wage Rate, F/M W (%) : Female Wage Rate as a percentage of corresponding Male Wage Rate. Wage / Salary earnings pertain to regular wage/salaried employees in 15-59 year age groups.

Source : Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94, 50th Round, National Sample Survey Organization, Department of Statistics, Government of India, Report No. 409, Table 55, pp. A 306-7 and A 309-10.

**Table I 5 : Estimated Total Employment in the Unorganized Sector by Sex and Residence, 1972-73 to 1993-94 - India**

(million)

Location	1972-73	1977-78	1983	1987-88	1993-94
<b>Rural</b>					
Total	188.5	211.0	220.0	240.2	254.4
Male	121.5	135.2	139.3	154.5	169.4
Female	67.0	75.8	80.7	85.8	100.2
<b>Urban</b>					
Total	38.5	49.2	59.7	69.5	74.2
Male	30.7	38.2	46.9	54.4	58.5
Female	7.8	11.1	12.7	15.1	16.6
<b>Total</b>					
Total	227.0	260.2	279.6	309.8	344.6
Male	152.3	173.4	186.2	208.9	227.8
Female	74.8	86.9	93.4	100.9	116.8

Source : Mukhopadhyay (1997), Table 3, p. 484.

Table I 6 : Percentage Distribution of Regular and Permanent Employees\* (15 Years and Above) in Public / Semi-Public / Private Concerns by Education and Sex, 1993-94 - Urban India

Broad Educational Level	Percentage of Permanent Employees As Per cent of Regularly Employed	Nature of Employees						N.R.**	Total	No. of Regularly Employed	
		Public		Semi - Public		Private				Estd. (00)	Sample
		Perma- nent	Others	Perma- nent	Others	Perma- nent	Others				
<b>Male</b>											
Not literate	45.2	19.3	2.4	6.6	1.7	19.3	47.0	3.7	100.0	20,670	1,955
Literate upto Pri. Middle & Sec. Higher Sec. & above	51.0 63.4 82.2	21.9 35.6 53.6	1.5 1.8 1.6	5.6 7.2 11.2	1.8 1.6 1.0	23.5 20.6 17.5	42.5 30.5 13.4	3.2 2.7 1.8	100.0 100.0 100.0	44,219 79,412 76,176	4,307 8,519 8,921
All Males	65.7	37.6	1.7	8.2	1.5	20.0	28.5	2.6	100.0	220,550	23,710
Estd. No of Regularly Emp. (00)	144,872	82,858	3,809	18,009	3,210	44,005	62,929	5,731	220,550	X	X
Sample No. of Employed	16,173	10,102	451	1,751	359	4,320	6,061	666	23,710	X	X
<b>Female</b>											
Not literate	30.3	13.2	3.8	6.7	2.0	10.4	58.7	5.3	100.0	9,568	912
Literate upto Pri. Middle & Sec. Higher Sec. & above	35.5 61.5 73.8	14.2 43.1 48.4	2.8 2.8 2.6	3.8 5.6 10.2	3.9 1.0 2.4	17.5 12.8 15.3	53.1 30.8 19.0	4.8 3.9 2.1	100.0 100.0 100.0	5,090 8,968 16,520	509 1,054 2,236
All Females	55.8	34.5	3.0	7.5	2.2	13.8	35.4	3.6	100.0	40,146	4,711
Estd. No of Regularly Emp. (00)	22,408	1,3837	1,186	3,014	881	5,557	14,223	1,448	40146	X	X
Sample No. of Employed	2,965	2,012	142	347	90	606	1,341	173	4,711	X	X

Note : \* Including subsidiary workers  
 \*\* N.R. denotes Not Reported

Source : Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94, 50th Round, National Sample Survey Organization, Department of Statistics, Government of India, Report No. 409, Table 82, Pp. A 468, A 469 and A 470.

Table 17 : Percentage Distribution of Regular and Permanent Employees\* (15 Years and Above) in Public/Semi-Public/Pvt Concerns by Education and Sex, 1993-94 (Rural) , India

Broad Educational Level	Percentage of Permanent Employees As Per cent of Regularly Employed	Nature of Employees						N.R.**	Total	No. of Regularly Employed			
		Public			Semi - Public					Perma- nent	Others	Estd. (00)	Sample
		Perma- nent	Others	Perma- nent	Others	Perma- nent	Others						
<i>Male</i>													
Not literate	34.7	13.5	3.6	3.0	2.7	18.2	49.5	100.0	26,329	1,545			
Literate up to Primary	46.2	24.3	3.5	5.2	2.7	16.6	40.6	100.0	28,855	1,805			
Middle & Sec.	62.5	41.2	4.9	8.6	2.8	12.7	24.1	100.0	49,638	3,672			
Higher Sec. & above	77.7	58.7	3.4	10.0	2.5	9.0	12.0	100.0	34,283	3,021			
All Males	57.6	36.8	4.0	7.2	2.7	13.7	29.3	100.0	139,117	10,044			
Estd. No. of Regularly Employed	80,139	51,176	5,541	9,970	3,729	18,994	40,814	139,117	X	X			
Sample No. of Employed	6,496	4,677	444	721	250	1,098	2,271	10,044	X	X			
<i>Female</i>													
Not literate	38.6	7.7	6.1	1.9	2.3	29.0	43.2	100.0	9842	522			
Literate up to Primary	31.1	10.6	11.6	2.7	4.5	17.9	44.0	100.0	3436	183			
Middle & Secondary	54.3	40.9	9.9	6.6	5.2	6.9	25.1	100.0	6242	565			
Higher Sec. & above	69.9	44.0	5.7	5.9	5.0	20.0	12.7	100.0	4467	472			
All Females	47.5	23.5	7.8	4.0	3.9	20.0	32.9	100.0	23,988	1,742			
Estd. No. of Regularly Employed	11,382	5,635	1,866	954	935	4,794	7,894	23,988	X	X			
Sample No. of Employed	1,022	685	129	86	61	251	417	1742	X	X			

Note : \* Including subsidiary workers

\*\* N.R. denotes Not Reported

Source : Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94, 50th Round, National Sample Survey Organisation, Department of Statistics, Government of India, Report No. 409, Table 82, pp. A 468, A 469 and A 470.

**Table N 1 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Population, 1961 - 91, Nepal**

Year	Total Population (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
1961	9.6	4.80	4.80	998	1.97	1.85
1971	11.6	5.84	5.76	986	2.78	2.42
1981	15.0	7.68	7.32	952	1.85	2.40
1991	18.5	9.23	9.27	1005		

Note : Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males.

Source :The Statistical Profile on Nepalese Women, Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Nepal, 1994, p. 11. Original data taken from the Population Census, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991, Central Bureau of Statistics.

**Table N 2 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Labour Force, 1971 - 91, Nepal**

Year	Total Labour Force (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
1971	4.85	3.43	1.42	414	2.71	5.26
1981	6.85	4.48	2.37	529	* -0.25	2.29
1991	7.34	4.37	2.97	680		

Note : Labour force denotes economically active population.

\* Denotes decrease

Source : Employment in Nepal : Prospects and Policies, ILO-South Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (ILO-SAAT), New Delhi, 1997, Table 1.1, p. 33. Original data taken from Population Monograph of Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu, 1995.

**Table N 3 : Percentage Distribution of Economically Inactive Population (10 Years and Above) by Reasons for Being Inactive by Sex, 1971-91, Nepal**

Reasons for Being Economically Inactive	1971			1981			1991		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Students	12.7	50.5	2.6	22.2	65.1	8.0	36.3	65.8	19.7
Homemakers	69.3	0.0	88.0	61.8	0.7	81.9	47.0	12.0	66.7
Aged	11.0	21.6	8.2	7.5	12.7	5.8	10.4	11.8	9.7
Physically and Mentally Handicapped	1.1	3.3	0.6	1.5	3.6	0.8	1.3	2.0	1.0
Others	0.3	1.3	0.0	3.4	10.9	1.0	3.5	6.8	1.7
Unspecified	5.5	23.4	0.6	3.6	7.0	2.5	1.4	1.7	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source : Population Monograph of Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1995, p. 222.

**Table N 4 : Unemployment Rates by Sex and Region, 1977-96, Nepal**

(%)

Year	Region	All	Male	Female
1977	All	5.6	5.3	6.0
	Rural	5.6	5.5	5.7
	Urban	6.0	4.5	10.2
1984/85	All	3.1	2.6	3.6
	Rural	2.7	2.2	3.2
	Urban	8.2	7.7	9.0
	Mountains	1.4	1.5	.2
	Hills	5.1	5.3	4.8
	Tarai	3.8	3.1	5.0
1995/96	All	4.9	5.5	4.3
	Rural	4.6	5.3	4.0
	Urban	8.4	8.0	8.8
	Mountains	2.1	2.8	1.4
	Hills	2.9	3.7	2.3
	Tarai	7.0	7.4	6.6

Note : 1977 : National Planning Commission;  
 1984/85 : Central Bureau of Statistics, Multipurpose Household Budget Survey;  
 1995/96 : Living Standards Measurement Study, World Bank

Source : Employment in Nepal : Prospects and Policies, ILO-SAAT, New Delhi, 1997, p. 35.

Table N 5 : Real Wage Rates (Daily) in Agriculture and Construction at 1987-88 Prices, Nepal

(In Nepalese Rupees)

Fiscal Year	Hills				Tarai East				Tarai West			
	Agriculture		Construction		Agriculture		Construction		Agriculture		Construction	
	FWR	F/M WR	(FWR)	F/M WR	(FWR)	F/M WR	(FWR)	F/M WR	(FWR)	F/M WR	(FWR)	F/M WR
1980/81	19.9	66.56	—	—	18.4	90.20	—	—	16.3	88.59	—	—
1981/82	18.5	67.52	—	—	20.2	91.40	—	—	19.2	88.07	—	—
1982/83	23.2	74.36	—	—	17.6	91.67	—	—	18.4	86.79	—	—
1983/84	22.8	75.00	—	—	21.1	92.95	—	—	18.7	83.48	—	—
1984/85	26.3	81.93	—	—	23.4	88.97	—	—	19.0	81.20	—	—
1985/86	25.0	79.87	—	—	23.5	96.31	—	—	18.9	88.32	—	—
1986/87	21.8	79.85	—	—	22.4	100.00	22.4	100.00	17.8	93.68	—	—
1987/88	35.0	100.00	35.0	100.00	21.0	93.33	—	—	21.0	100.00	—	—
1988/89	37.0	100.00	34.1	94.72	20.6	88.03	20.6	88.03	21.5	83.66	—	—
1989/90	32.0	94.12	31.9	95.22	22.8	96.20	21.6	91.14	25.9	92.50	—	—
1990/91	31.0	77.50	34.1	85.46	22.8	89.06	24.8	89.86	25.6	86.78	27.6	93.56
1991/92	27.0	75.00	31.5	87.74	21.0	86.78	24.2	88.32	21.0	83.33	22.6	91.13
1992/93	24.0	63.16	33.5	89.33	22.3	88.14	25.3	89.40	19.3	83.19	22.3	88.14

Note : FWR : Female Wage Rate (in NRs)

F/MWR : Female/Male Wage Ratio (per cent)

- Denotes not available

Source : Employment in Nepal , ILO - SAAT, New Delhi, 1997, p. 38. Original data taken from Nepal Rastra Bank Quarterly Bulletins, various years.



**Table P 1 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Population, 1961 - 94, Pakistan**

Year	Total Population (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
<b>Census</b>						
1961	43.0	23.03	19.97	867		
					3.79	3.87
1972	65.0	34.67	30.33	875		
					2.75	3.14
1981	84.3	44.25	40.05	905		
					3.05	3.05
<b>LFS</b>						
1991	113.8	59.74	54.06	905		
					3.08	3.08
1992	117.3	61.57	55.73	905		
					2.98	2.98
1993	120.8	63.41	57.39	905		
					3.06	3.06
1994	124.5	65.35	59.15	905		

Note : \* Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males. The last Population Census was conducted in 1981.

Source : Economic Survey 1995-96, Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, p. 10. Original data taken from the Federal Bureau of Statistics, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan.

**Table P 2 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Labour Force, 1987 - 94, Pakistan**

Year	Total Labour Force (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
1987-88	26.6	23.50	3.10	132*		
					13.24	7.72
1990-91	31.8	27.30	4.50	165		
					15.43	13.33
1991-92	33.0	27.80	5.20	187		
					-3.93	-6.95
1992-93	33.7	28.71	4.99	174		
					3.97	1.15
1993-94	34.7	29.51	5.19	176		

Note : \* Refers to sex ratio of employed labour force. Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males. The definition of labour force used in 1990-91 surveys has been changed from the old (1987-88 and prior) definition in Pakistan. For details see 50 Years of Pakistan in Statistics, Vol. IV, 1982-97, p. 773.

Source : ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1995, 54th issue, ILO Geneva.

**Table P 3 : Percentage Distribution of Female Industrial Labour Force by Age in Selected Industries, 1990, Pakistan**

Industries	Age (Years)							
	12-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
Total	4.64	31.21	25.48	11.65	13.92	7.27	4.00	1.73
Fisheries	7.69	5.13	10.26	12.82	23.07	38.46	2.56	0.00
Garments	8.09	40.45	20.67	7.42	12.36	5.84	2.92	2.25
Electronics	1.19	42.86	35.71	9.52	7.14	2.38	1.19	0.00
Pharmaceuticals	1.16	28.57	36.29	18.15	11.58	3.09	1.16	0.00
Food and beverages	3.32	30.65	22.58	3.23	11.29	14.51	1.29	1.61
Cosmetics	0.00	20.00	62.86	11.43	5.71	0.00	0.00	0.00
Brick-Kiln	4.11	13.70	15.07	18.49	26.02	10.27	8.22	4.10
Others	0.00	20.69	6.90	6.90	20.69	17.24	20.68	6.90

Source : Women in Pakistan : A Country Profile, UN-ESCAP 1996, p. 68.

**Table P 4 : Unemployment Rates\* of Population (10 Years and Above) by Sex, 1985-94, Pakistan (%)**

	1985	1986	1987	1991	1992	1993	1994
Total	3.7	3.6	3.1	6.3	5.9	4.7	4.7
Male	4.0	3.9	3.3	4.5	4.3	3.8	3.8
Female	1.5	1.7	1.1	16.8	14.2	10.3	10.3

Note : \* Percentage of unemployed to total labour force

Source : ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1995, 54th issue, Geneva.

**Table P 5 : Employment in Autonomous/Semi-Autonomous Corporations / Bodies Under the Federal Government by Sex, 1989, Pakistan**

Organization	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Per cent Female
All organizations	167,524	165,850	1,674	1.0
Selected organizations, Water and Power	140,420	139,870	550	0.4
Development Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation	4,988	4,881	107	2.1
Pakistan Television	4,044	3,923	121	3.0
Pakistan International Airlines	18,072	17,176	896	5.0

Source : Women in Pakistan : A Country Profile, UN-ESCAP 1996, p. 57. Original data taken from Second Census of Employees of Autonomous/ Semi- Autonomous Corporations/ Bodies under the Federal Government, 1989, Management Services Division, Government of Pakistan.

**Table SL 1 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Population, 1963 - 94, Sri Lanka**

Year	Total Population (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
1963	10.6	5.51	5.09	924	2.16	2.42
1971	12.7	6.54	6.16	943	1.44	1.65
1981	14.8	7.54	7.26	962	1.47	1.47
1994*	17.9	9.12	8.78	962		

Note : \* Provisional - Mid Year Estimate

Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males.

Source : Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo, 1991.

**Table SL 2 : Size, Annual Growth Rate and Sex Ratio of the Labour Force, 1963 - 96, Sri Lanka**

Year	Total Labour Force (in million)	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Annual Average Growth Rate (Male)	Annual Average Growth Rate (Female)
1963 Census						
1963	3.5	2.77	0.73	262	2.28	6.24
1971	4.5	3.32	1.18	355	1.24	0.53
1981	5.0	3.76	1.24	331	1.59	10.74
LFS					488	
1985-86		6.0	4.03	1.97	1.91	6.46
1990	7.0	4.39	2.61	594	-2.02	-9.46
1994*	5.8	4.05	1.75	433	2.43	5.58
1996*	6.2	4.25	1.95	460		

Note : \* Provisional - Mid Year Estimate

Sex ratio is the number of females per 1,000 males

Source : Figures derived from data in Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December, 1997, Table 1. Original data taken from :  
 Census Reports, 1963, 1971, 1981;  
 Labour Force and Socio Economic Survey, 1985/86  
 Labour Force Survey 1st Quarter, 1990, 4th Quarter, 1996  
 Demographic Survey, 1994  
 Department of Census and Statistics

**Table SL 3 : Unemployment Rates by Sex and Residence, 1971-96, Sri Lanka**

(%)

Year	Location	Total	Male	Female
1971	Urban	19.9	14.8	37.2
	Rural	17.2	12.7	30.4
1973				
1973	Urban	32.1	24.1	55.0
	Rural	24.5	18.3	42.4
	Plantation	12.0	14.3	9.4
1978/79	Urban	20.7	12.4	37.7
	Rural	14.6	8.7	26.3
	Plantation	5.6	5.7	5.4
1981/82	Urban	14.2	10.1	25.1
	Rural	12.0	7.3	25.3
	Plantation	5.0	6.4	3.6
1985/86	Urban	19.5	15.8	27.9
	Rural	13.2	9.5	21.3
	Plantation	7.8	9.0	6.4
1990	Urban	18.5	11.3	32.0
	Rural	13.6	8.6	21.8
*1994	Urban	15.3	11.6	24.3
	Rural	13.3	9.5	20.2
* 1996	Urban	10.1	7.4	16.4
	Rural	11.3	9.0	16.1

Note : \* Excludes North and East Provinces

Source : Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December 1997, Table 3. Original data taken from Census 1971; Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Survey 1973, 1978/79, 1981/82; Central Bank; Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey 1985/86, Department of Census and Statistics; Labour Force Survey 1990 (1st Quarter), 1996 (4th Quarter); Demographic Survey 1994, Department of Census and Statistics.

**Table SL 4 : Unemployment Rates by Education and Sex, 1985/86-1994, Sri Lanka**

(%)

Educational Level	1985/86			1994*		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
No schooling	6.1	7.7	4.8	2.5	3.7	1.6
School Years 1-5	7.7	7.0	9.4	8.9	8.3	10.2
School Years 6-8	11.2	9.5	16.5	—	—	—
School Years 9-10	20.8	15.4	34.9	12.7	9.6	21.2
GCE(O)	22.3	14.4	35.6	18.4	12.2	29.6
GCE(A)	6.3	18.7	44.9	—	—	—
Degree	—	3.3	10.2	25.2	14.7	34.1
Postgraduate						
Degree	3.9	4.2	3.2	—	—	—
All Levels	14.1	10.8	20.8	13.6	9.9	20.8

Note : \* Excludes North and East Provinces  
 - Denotes not available

Source : Women and Employment : In Facet of Change : Women in Sri Lanka, 1986-95, Colombo, CENWOR, 1995, p. 163. Original data taken from Labour Force Surveys 1985/86, 1994 (1st Quarter).

**Table SL 5 : Wage Disparities by Gender in Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Sector, 1985-94, Sri Lanka**

Year	Agricultural Earnings per day		Non-agricultural Earnings per day		F/M WR (minimum)
	FWR (Rs.)	F/M WR	FWR (Rs.)	F/M WR	
1985	22.40	88.20	4.65	71.10	77.88
1986	23.20	90.40	4.37	73.94	86.93
1987	23.50	92.90	4.94	74.62	92.08
1988	34.60	97.00	5.22	75.22	89.75
1989	39.50	95.20	6.30	76.46	94.63
1990	47.30	92.20	8.68	91.18	99.28
1991	51.00	99.80	10.45	90.01	102.93
1992	63.20	89.00	11.45	91.97	99.72
1993	67.30	88.30	13.88	100.29	99.24
1994	73.20	94.60	14.82	97.12	98.84

Note : FWR (Rs.) : Female Wage Rate in Sri Lankan Rupees  
F/M WR : Female/Male Wage Ratio ( per cent)

Source : Calculated on the basis of data presented in Ch. 5, ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1995, 54th Issue, Geneva.

**Table SL 6 : Senior Officials, Managers and Professionals by Sector and Sex, 1990, Sri Lanka**

Sector	Senior Officials and Managers				Professionals			
	Total	Male No.	Female		Total	Male No.	Female	
			No.	%			No.	%
State	2,274	1,964	310	13.6	17,119	6,846	10,273	60.1
Public	1,117	996	121	10.8	161,519	54,607	106,912	66.1
Semi Government	5,657	5,077	580	10.2	11,082	7,241	3,841	34.6

Source : Census of Public Sector and Corporation Sector Employment 1990, Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Policy Planning and Implementation.