

# **The Proposed Gender Planning Network for South and South East Asia : An Expository Note<sup>\*</sup>**

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## **I. Introduction**

The proposed Regional Gender Planning Network in South and South East Asia intends to provide a basis for systematic gender research in the region in order to facilitate among other things, the analysis of impact of macro economic policy changes on women and help devise appropriate policies to address these.

Ever since structural economic reforms were adopted in the region, apprehensions have been expressed regarding the impact of such reforms on poor and marginalized sections of the economy, including women. A number of reasons have been cited for such views. These include arguments such as those advanced by Diane Elson regarding an inherent bias against women in the operationalization of structural adjustment programmes, in so far as such market - centered programmes take a partial view of the total labour allocation process by ignoring altogether women's reproductive labour within the household (Elson 1994). There are also other general reasons cited that are likely to hurt both men and women, such as downplaying of labour rights and job security requirements, privatization of publicly owned concerns leading to higher insecurities of private sector jobs, globalization leading to erosion of level playing fields of domestic concerns etc. Women being concentrated at lower ends of job spectra, these developments are likely to hurt women more than men in the labour market. Apart from this, there are other likely fall - outs which are, if true, may hurt women more than men. Such fall - outs include adverse changes in household economic environment leading to greater penury and more hardships at the household level which women as home managers have to face, reduction in state responsibility in social sectors such as health care and care of the aged leading to increased work load for women within the family, and so on. There is also the question of making adjustments of various kinds such as in increased involvement in wage labour to bridge the gap in household economic needs, budgetary adjustments brought about by increases in prices and livelihood restructuring adjustments induced by instabilities propelled by adjustment processes, and so on (Ghosh 1993, Mukhopadhyay 1998).

Most of these arguments are based on a prior reasoning. Not much information exists in the way of standardized evidence at the macro level to either refute or

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corroborate the hypothesis that structural adjustment programmes have had a significant gendered impact. A long run objective of this network would be to strive towards building a framework which would facilitate the analysis of such questions at the macro level.

One obvious suggestion that would occur to economists would be to try to build a sensible macro model incorporating gender in disaggregated form so that such questions can be analyzed. However, this is much easier said than done, for a number of reasons. The most obvious of them is the paucity of data. Most women in South Asia work in the agricultural sector and a very large majority work as unpaid family labour. They also are engaged in multiple activities, some of which are economically productive, some purely domestic and some fall in a fuzzy zone in between the two. Such fuzzy zone activities are technically considered to be economically productive if one goes by the revised definitions as expounded by the UN System of National Accounts of 1993. However, no concrete estimates of women's labour market involvements using such definitions of work exist. There is also very little information on the nature of multiple activities of women. Apart from this, the quality of gender disaggregated data on various other dimensions of women's lives is also quite inadequate.

But more important than data, and perhaps in some senses more intractable, is the problem of modelling gender. To start with, there is no universally valid or adequate method of measuring gender bias. It is a phenomenon which is rooted in the social psyche, and manifests itself in multifarious ways. The manifestations can be very diverse under different conditions. What may be a good indicator of gender discrimination under one set of conditions may not be the right indicator under a different set. Gender differences in nutritional status within the household may be a good indicator of gender bias in poor households. In more affluent households, the bias may show up in restrictions on female mobility. Thus capturing this complex phenomenon within a structural framework for the purpose of modelling by itself can be a challenge.

Besides, the primary locale of gender bias is within the family. There are very few estimable and tractable models of intra family relationships that can be used to capture these. Standard models of game theory would not apply here. Neither cooperative nor non-cooperative game theoretic models can adequately characterize such relationships. A promising way of modelling intra-family gender relations could be within the framework of cooperative conflict as expounded by A. K. Sen (Sen 1990). However, tying this up with macro or meso level econometric models is another problematic area.

In the absence of counterfactuals, even the relatively easier analytical problem of tracing the impact of macro policy changes within the family by various indicators of well-being disaggregated by gender can be a daunting task. This is a wide open area of research both analytically as well as from the operational point of view.

A workshop organized by ISST and sponsored by IDRC in June 1997 in New Delhi deliberated on some of these questions. The Theme Paper for the workshop (Mukhopadhyay and Sudarshan 1997) and the Report of the Proceedings (ISST 1997) summarize the issues and lay out the contours of a research agenda. Subsequently a full - fledged research proposal was submitted to IDRC by the Institute of Social Studies Trust for establishing a Gender Planning Network in the region in order to address these issues in a systematic and coordinated manner (ISST 1998).

## II. Women in the South Asia<sup>1</sup>

### *Women's work in South Asia*

Data provided by the official statistical systems in South Asia suggests that Labour force Participation Rates of women in this part of the world are very low : much lower, for instance than those reported from most other regions (Table 1). Yet by all accounts, women of South Asia put in long hours of 'work' ----- longer by far on an average than men do. A local saying in Hunza valley of Pakistan goes as follows : *'So if a woman sits down, ....they say is this female a man or is she a woman?'* The trouble is that large parts of women's labouring activities are not recorded as economically productive work. This could be due to one of two reasons, i. e., either because they are of a purely 'domestic' nature, or because they are mistakenly perceived as extensions of domestic work and hence excluded from the purview of economically productive work. The latter happens primarily because both the *content* and the *context* of women's work makes proper accounting of such work very difficult. A very large majority of women in South Asia work in farm sectors (Table 2), often as unpaid family labour or within the household in home - based productive activities that remain invisible from official eyes (Table 3). The whole range of activities that are termed non - market productive work by SNA 1993, such as collection of fuel and firewood, fetching water etc. ----- tasks that are mainly carried out by women in this part of the world ----- is also mostly excluded from official calculations, although in principle they should not be. Thus in spite of putting in hard and long hours of labour by majority of women in South Asia, the recorded participation of South Asian women in the labour market is abysmally low.

In order to understand the context within which the majority of women work in South Asia, one needs to recall that South Asia is fast emerging as one of the poorest and least gender-sensitive regions in the world. According to the report on Human Development in South Asia in 1997, GNP per capita in the region is less than one - third of that in the rest of the developing world, and less than one - fiftieth of that in industrial countries. Barring Sri Lanka, which stands out in the region in terms of social development indicators, adult literacy rates in the region as a whole are

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<sup>1</sup> Based on sections of Mukhopadhyay, Women's Work in South Asia.

abysmally low : lower by far than corresponding rates in neighbouring East and South East Asia (Table 4). In terms of gender development indicators, South East Asia ranks very low compared to most other regions. It is the only region in the world where life expectancy at birth has barely ceased to be adverse to women. Gender parity in literacy, health status, earned income shares, or labour force participation is appallingly low (Table 5).

### ***Social systems and gender roles in South Asia***

Distinctive gender roles and responsibilities for men and women are ingrained in the South Asian psyche in a manner which is probably far stronger than in the West. The dominant Hindu tradition in this respect is based on the precepts of the Manu Samhita which looks upon the female as a complement to the male in the social order, but one who is distinctly subservient to the male. According to the precepts of Manu, a woman has to be under the father in her childhood, the husband in her adulthood and the son in her old age. Similarly Islam, the other major religion in the region, assigns women's place squarely in the domestic sphere, under the protection of the male. The birth of a male child is usually greeted with much jubilation, while the birth of a girl child rarely evokes much happiness. After all, a girl child will go away to another household, would need dowry to be married off and it is no wonder that she is basically looked upon as a burden. The male child on the other hand is going to be with the family, look after parents in their old age, and according to Hindu beliefs, perform the last rites of the parents to deliver them from hell. It is immaterial how much of these beliefs and expectations are realized in real life. The beliefs persist and in many communities, the birth of a girl is deemed as a mini disaster, sometimes leading to female infanticide.

Socialization of gender roles starts very early in South Asian culture. This is evident in the very different and distinctive time - use pattern of young girls and boys in South Asian families. Girls are taught domestic skills from a very young age, while young boys are generally spared from it.

Much of South Asian society, especially in India, Nepal, and to a certain extent Sri Lanka, is also ridden with caste hierarchies. It has been argued that the caste system had evolved from the inner logic and dialectics of the Vedic philosophy for ensuring a holistic organization of the social system. In practice, this has hardly been the case. Caste hierarchies have split the South Asian society in irretrievable ways, the results of which can be seen in the sectarian politics of the region today. Although strictly speaking, caste is a Hindu phenomenon, the hierarchical social structure it presumes has influenced all other major religious groups in the sub-continent. Historically to a large extent caste hierarchies have been tied up with class hierarchies, in so far as upper castes have always had easier access to resources, opportunities and assets.

The high degree of social stratification along class and caste dimensions has had its implications for the gender dimension of society as well. Gender roles are rigid in the region, just as caste and class hierarchies are deeply entrenched in the social fabric. On top of it, being a region which houses the majority of the world's poor, endemic poverty is a fact of life for a large fragment of the South Asian economy. Gender discrimination and poverty are the two major factors that determine the conditions under which the average South Asian woman spends her life.

### **III. What the network intends to do<sup>2</sup>**

The first set of issues the gender network plans to address are those dealing with the observed manifestations of gender bias. For this purpose, partnering organizations in the five countries that are involved in the first phase of the project<sup>3</sup> will scan all major 'conventional' indicators of gender bias ----- social, economic, demographic and political ----- from available large scale surveys and censuses. The focus will be on mapping various indicators across one another in order to discern distinct patterns of association under different contexts. It is hoped that such mappings and the patterns that emerge from them, both across groups and over time, would provide better insights into the nature of gender bias and the dynamics of gender balance in society, community and the family.

It is also being proposed that one goes beyond the analysis of 'conventional' indicators of gender bias and look into the implications of changes in external economic environments by tracing their impact on 'not - so - conventional' indicators such as gender - related stress, anxiety and violence. This is proposed to be done through household surveys in sectors / regions / industries which have been affected by structural adjustment programmes. It is hoped that these two components of the project will contribute to the designing of an appropriate structural framework which may be used to trace the genderized impact of macro policy changes in the region in a later phase.

Apart from the country components, the project will have a regional component as well. Two background papers will be prepared and a gender modelling exercise will be carried out under the regional agenda. A research paper on gender violence at the regional level is expected, among other things, to feed into appropriate designing of the household surveys for mapping contextual variations in 'conventional' indicators of gender bias against gender violence or credible threat of such violence. A second paper will survey the existing literature on gender modelling with a view to facilitate incorporation of gender in macro modelling exercises. There is also a proposal to initiate a gender modelling exercise within a

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<sup>2</sup> The details of the work proposed to be done under the project can be obtained from the proposal submitted to IDRC

<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in Bangladesh, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) in India, Agricultural Projects Services Centre (APROSC) in Nepal, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in Pakistan, and Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) in Sri Lanka

standard input - output framework by incorporating gender - disaggregated breakdown of the final consumption vector using a 27 - sector model of the Indian economy.

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## Statistical Tables

**Table I : Labour Force Participation Rates by Sex in South Asia**

Year	Male	Female	All	
<b>BANGLADESH</b>				<p>All figures relate to the age group 10 years and above.</p> <p><b>Bangladesh</b></p> <p><u>Notes</u> Based on extended labour force definition.</p> <p><u>Source</u> Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Ministry of Planning, December 1996.</p> <p><b>India</b></p> <p><u>Notes</u> Figures relate to usually working according to both principal and subsidiary status. 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 below mentioned sources.</p> <p><u>Source</u> Employment and Unemployment in India, National Sample Survey Organisation 1993-94, Department of Statistics, Govt. of India, March 1997.</p> <p><b>Nepal</b></p> <p><u>Note</u> In 1971 &amp; 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 1991 census it was any length of time</p> <p><u>Source</u> 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.</p> <p><b>Pakistan</b></p> <p><u>Note</u> --</p> <p><u>Source</u> Economic Survey 1995-96, Govt. of Pakistan, Finance Division, Economic Advisor's Wing, Islamabad.</p> <p><b>Sri Lanka</b></p> <p><u>Note</u> * Excludes North and East.</p> <p><u>Source</u> Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka, Centre for</p>
<b>Usual Definition</b>				
1989	81.0	10.6	47.0	
1990-91	79.6	14.1	48.8	
1995-96	77.0	18.1	48.3	
<b>Extended Definition</b>				
1989	81.0	61.6	71.6	
1990-91	79.6	58.2	69.6	
1995-96	78.3	50.6	64.8	
<b>INDIA</b>				
1972-73	54.2	27.9	42.0	
1977-78	56.0	31.0	44.0	
1983	55.1	29.9	43.0	
1987-88	54.5	28.8	42.0	
1993-94	55.6	28.7	42.6	
<b>NEPAL</b>				
1971	82.9	35.1	59.3	
1981	83.1	46.2	65.1	
1991	68.7	45.3	56.9	
<b>PAKISTAN</b>				
1971-72	78.7	8.1	45.2	
1974-75	67.7	6.4	43.8	
1978-79	77.3	11.8	46.1	
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>SRI LANKA</b>				
1946	76.1	24.8	52.4	
1953	73.0	26.9	51.6	
1963	69.2	20.0	45.9	
1971	68.4	26.0	48.0	
1981	65.4	22.5	44.4	
1985/86	68.6	32.5	50.3	
1990	67.4	39.4	53.3	
* 1994	68.6	28.9	48.5	
* 1996	66.1	30.7	48.5	





**Table II : Distribution of Female Workforce by Broad Industry Divisions in South Asia**

Country / Year	Agriculture , Hunting, Forestry & Fishing	Mining & Quarrying	Manufac- turing	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	All Divisions
<b>BANGLADESH</b>											
1990-91	84.9	--	8.6	0.0	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.3	4.3	100.0
1995-96	77.5	0.0	7.2	0.1	0.4	2.3	0.2	0.1	8.4	3.8	100.0
<b>INDIA</b>											
1972 - 73	84.4	0.2	6.6	--	1.3	2.2	--	5.0	--	--	100.0
1977 - 78	81.6	0.2	8.6	--	0.8	2.8	0.2	5.6	--	--	100.0
1983	80.7	0.3	8.8	--	1.0	2.8	0.3	5.7	--	--	100.0
1987 - 88	77.2	0.5	9.6	--	2.8	3.1	0.2	6.4	--	--	100.0
1993 - 94	77.5	0.4	9.4	--	1.4	3.2	0.3	7.9	--	--	100.0
<b>NEPAL</b>											
1971	98.2	--	0.5	--	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.8	--	100.0
1981	95.8	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	1.9	1.4	100.0
1991	90.5	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.1	2.0	0.1	0.1	5.3	0.6	100.0
<b>PAKISTAN</b>											
1984-85	75.1	--	11.4	0.1	0.3	1.4	0.3	0.4	10.9	--	100.0
1985-86	78.4	--	9.4	--	0.4	1.6	0.4	0.1	9.7	--	100.0
1986-87	76.0	--	11.3	0.1	0.3	1.3	--	0.2	10.8	--	100.0
1987-88	72.2	0.1	13.3	--	0.8	2.2	0.3	0.4	10.6	0.2	100.0
1990-91	66.0	--	13.3	0.1	1.3	3.1	0.6	0.2	15.4	--	100.0
1991-92	68.8	0.1	14.3	0.1	0.9	3.4	0.4	0.1	11.9	0.1	100.0
1992-93	69.5	--	10.9	0.1	1.0	2.9	0.4	0.1	15.0	0.1	100.0
1993-94	72.4	--	9.8	0.1	1.1	2.8	0.6	0.1	13.3	--	100.0

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**SRI LANKA**

<b>1953</b>	60.3	0.2	12.4	0.0	0.4	4.1	0.7	1.1	15.2	5.5	100.0
<b>1963</b>	63.5	0.1	9.7	0.0	0.2	3.6	0.4	0.1	18.9	3.5	100.0
<b>1971</b>	61.8	0.1	12.2	0.0	0.1	2.9	0.1	0.2	16.2	5.8	100.0
<b>1981</b>	52.0	0.3	11.3	0.1	0.6	4.4	1.0	1.0	23.3	6.0	100.0
<b>1985/86</b>	54.2	0.6	18.6	0.0	0.6	6.6	0.5	0.9	16.3	1.5	100.0
<b>1990</b>	50.5	1.3	20.1	0.1	0.6	5.7	0.7	0.6	20.5	--	100.0
<b>* 1994</b>	42.1	0.4	23.8	0.1	0.6	6.0	0.9	1.8	21.6	2.7	100.0

All figures relate to age groups 10 years and above.

**Countries**

**Notes**

**Source**

**Bangladesh**

- Based on extended labour force definition.

- Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, December 1996.

**India**

- Figures relate to usual status workers, principal and subsidiary.

- Employment and Unemployment in India, National Sample Survey Organization 1993-94, Department of Statistics, Govt. of India, March 1997.

**Nepal**

- In 1971 & 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

- Population Monograph of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, His Majesty's Government, 1995.

1991 Census, it was any length of time.

**Pakistan**

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**Sri Lanka**

- \*Excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces.

- Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December 1997.

**Table III : Distribution of Female Workforce by Labour Status Categories in South Asia**

Year	Self Employed			Employees		Unspecified	All
	Employers	Own Account Workers	Unpaid Family Labour	Regular Employees	Casual Labour		
<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

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**SRI LANKA**

<b>1953</b>	1.3	18.9	12.9	66.9	--	100.0
<b>1963</b>	0.5	8.9	6.7	82.2	--	100.0
<b>1971</b>	0.8	11.2	11.2	76.9	--	100.0
<b>1981</b>	1.2	12.9	6.5	79.4	--	100.0
<b>1985/86</b>	0.9	17.7	23.0	58.4	--	100.0
<b>1990</b>	1.2	18.1	25.1	55.6	--	100.0
<b>* 1994</b>	1.1	16.5	14.6	67.8	--	100.0
<b>* 1996</b>	0.3	16.9	18.2	64.6	--	100.0

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

<u>Countries</u>	<u>Notes</u>	<u>Source</u>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on extended labour force definition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report on Labour Force Survey in Bangladesh 1995-96, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, December 1996</li> </ul>
<b>India</b>	<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>Employment and Unemployment in India, National Sample Survey Organization 1993-94, Department of Statistics, Govt. of India, March, 1997.</li> </ul>
<b>Nepal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 1971 &amp; 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 1991 census it was any length of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population Monograph of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, His Majesty's Government, 1995</li> </ul>
<b>Pakistan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data not available.</li> </ul>	
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Excludes Northern and Eastern Provinces.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender Dimensions of Employment in Sri Lanka, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), December 1997.</li> </ul>

**Table IV : Development Indicators for South Asian, Developing and Industrial Countries**

Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	South Asia	Developing Countries	Industrial Countries
GNP per capita (US\$)	220	300	190	430	600	309	970	16394
Real GDP per capita (PPP\$)	1290	1240	1000	2160	3030	1370	2696	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 V : 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 Enrollment (1990-5)	87	81 <sup>1</sup>	68 <sup>1</sup>	45 <sup>1</sup>	98 <sup>1</sup>
Combined Enrollment (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>

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

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

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

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