

**SOUTH  
ASIA  
REGIONAL  
WORKSHOP**

# **Global Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Women**

**A Human Rights Perspective**

**August 22-23, 2010, New Delhi, India**



**A Report**

**SOUTH  
ASIA  
REGIONAL  
WORKSHOP**

# **Global Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Women**

**A Human Rights Perspective**

**August 22-23, 2010, New Delhi, India**

**A Report**



**Global Financial and Economic Crisis  
and its Impact on Women:  
A Human Rights Perspective**

© 2011 by PWESCR, all right reserved

*Written by:*

**Shipra Nigam and Dr. Shalini Mishra**

*Published by:*

**PWESCR (Programme on Women's  
Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)**

DD-29, Nehru Enclave, Kalkaji, 2nd Floor

New Delhi 110019, India

Ph: +91-11-40536091-93

Fax: +91-11-40536095

[pwescr@pwescr.org](mailto:pwescr@pwescr.org)

[www.pwescr.org](http://www.pwescr.org)

*Designed and Printed by:*

**Systems Vision**

[systemsvision@gmail.com](mailto:systemsvision@gmail.com)

# Contents



4  
ABBREVIATIONS

5  
INTRODUCTION

7  
MESSAGE FROM OUR PARTNERS

8  
THE CONTEXT

13  
THE CRISIS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH ASIA

32  
CONFLICT AND ISSUES OF INTERNATIONAL AID  
EXPERIENCES FROM AFGHANISTAN

36  
CRISIS AND WOMEN'S NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

44  
POLICY RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

52  
THE WAY FORWARD

57  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

58  
ANNEXURE: BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

# Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank	MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
BPL	Below Poverty Line	MNCs	Multinational Corporations
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
EPZ	Export Processing Zone	NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
EU	European Union	NTFP	Non Timber Forest Produce
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization	PDS	Public Distribution System
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment	PESA	Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act
FHAN	Federation of Handicraft Associations of Nepal	R&R	Relief and Rehabilitation
FIIIs	Foreign Institutional Investors	RBI	Reserve Bank of India
FTA	Free Trade Agreement	RSBY	Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana
FTZ	Free Trade Zone	RTF	Right To Food
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	S&P	Standard and Poor
GMOs	Genetically Modified Organisms	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
ICAR	Indian Council for Agricultural Research	SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Agreement
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services	SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	SC/ST	Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	SEZ	Special Economic Zone
IFIs	International Financial Institutions	SHG	Self Help Group
ILO	International Labour Organization	TINA	There Is No Alternative
IMF	International Monetary Fund	UNCESCR	United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate	UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IT	Information Technology	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals	UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
MFN	Most Favoured Nation	WB	World Bank
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act	WTO	World Trade Organization

# Introduction

The current global crisis began in the housing sector of the US economy, spilled over into the financial sector moving on to the real sector of the developed and developing world, causing immense hardship for millions of poor and vulnerable people in developing countries in the process. Despite tentative signs of recovery more recently, the economic and human costs of the crisis have been considerable. Women in particular, are adversely affected by the current crisis, which itself combines multiple crises – a global economic recession, the devastating effects of climate change, and an ongoing food and energy crisis. All of this is compounding increasing poverty and inequality in different parts of the world, as well as increasing the vulnerability of women in particular where adverse health and nutritional impacts are concerned. The current situation, however, has to be understood within the larger historical context of an aggressive promotion of neo liberal policies in the past decades. The crisis is not new for most of the developing countries that have struggled with crises right from the 70's, with women's groups in particular, emphatically voicing their protest and resistance to such policies in terms of its destructive

effects on women's livelihoods, increased burdens of work and unpaid labour, as well as loss of social security nets. This crisis, however, reached global proportions when it impacted advanced economies and their role in global arenas, thereby bringing out the interconnectedness of the divergent realities in a globalized world.

National as well as international institutions are facing diverse pressures in the fields of growth, employment, food security, and fiscal policy formulations in terms of framing adequate responses to contain both the financial sector crisis, and the meltdown of production and employment all around the globe. The crisis also provides an opportunity to rethink macro and micro-economic policies. For those advocating a gender based approach in designing policy frameworks, the crisis is an opportunity to advance proposals that promote jobs, economic security and human rights, and equality by class, gender, and ethnicity. Reviving the global economy will require policies that focus heavily on job creation and ensure a more equitable and sustainable development process that protects and enhances women's livelihoods. As the crisis is now a driving force behind many development choices

and processes (from the global to the local), that will shape approaches to development for years to come, the role of women becomes crucial, not merely because of the inevitable negative gendered impacts of these crises, but also because women themselves are crucial development players in most communities the world over and have a vital role to play in proposing effective approaches to alleviate the impacts of the crisis within a framework of human rights, environmental sustainability and development commitments around the world. The inclusion of women and gender equality within a framework of human rights is central to these processes, and an indicator of both the seriousness as well as the efficacy of proposed responses.

In this context, there are only a few studies focusing on the gendered impacts of the global financial and economic crisis on the South Asian countries. Common economic analyses highlight the social impact using financial indicators. However, this approach ignores women and other sections of society, who function outside the neo-liberal economic framework. There is seemingly a gap in policymakers' understanding of the issue and, more

importantly, in women's ability to ensure protection and enforcement of their rights. Further, there is a growing concern that without an integrated gender and human rights approach, the alternatives proposed to address the crisis will continue to increase women's marginalization and vulnerabilities rather than address it.

A gender analysis of the human rights situation is therefore necessary in order to understand the impact of the crisis on women and their livelihoods. In South Asia, there is an urgent need for engaging, sharing, discussing these issues and formulating alternative policies, strategies and recommendations. Hence, the PWESCR (Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) in partnership with UN Women and Heinrich Böll

Foundation (HBF) hosted a two day South Asian Regional workshop. The workshop was intended to enable experts to develop policy and advocacy tools in order to address the negative impact of the crisis from a gender and human rights perspective. The challenge before us was not only to identify gaps in the current discourse in terms of what was needed from the state as well as from other actors, and to incorporate those alternatives into the state agenda, but also to bring out the possibility of incorporating economic rights within the framework of human rights while developing a comprehensive social protection system.

The two day workshop began with an opening session, which set the context in terms of a global and regional perspective on 'Women in Crisis' within

a rights-based framework. The sessions that followed covered a wide range of issues from food security, livelihoods, natural resource management and women's economic rights from a gendered perspective, with a human rights-based approach towards policy issues and concerns. Towards the end of the workshop a concrete policy agenda 'The Way Forward' was drafted, drawing upon suggestions made during the conference.

We hope the experiences and ideas discussed in this meeting will be of interest to a wide range of audiences.

**Priti Darooka**  
*Executive Director*  
PWESCR

# Message from Our Partners

## UN Women (Formerly UNIFEM)<sup>1</sup>

UNIFEM believes the crisis provides an opportunity to revisit existing micro and macro-economic policies and review policies that rely heavily on job creation in order to ensure a more equitable and sustainable development process that protects livelihoods of marginalized women and men. A gendered analysis is necessary to understand the impact of the crisis on women and their livelihoods.

UNIFEM has provided support to women's organizations dealing with issues related to the financial and economic crisis and its impact on women. The impact on South Asia has been different from South East Asia and other parts of the Asian region, and a lot more should be done in order to promote gender equity. UNIFEM's threefold agenda in this regard focuses on women's economic empowerment and rights, the rising problem of HIV Aids and issues of democratic and participatory governance.

**Anne Stenhammer**  
*Regional Programme Director*  
*UN Women*

## Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF)

Gender policy, feminist analysis and strategies have a permanent place and are of key importance to HBF's activities. It was hoped that the workshop could use the crisis to critique the neo-liberal paradigm and formulate a 'gendered' position. A critical assessment of the current economic system and evolution of 'gender-just alternatives' emanating from good practices, was highly necessary. As a strategic objective, HBF seeks to develop partnerships with local and regional groups in order to more effectively work for economic and social change at the community, national and global levels. The foundation envisions these partnerships as a means to collaborate on research and analysis that identifies links between local issues and policy decisions, especially relating to economic liberalization and trade. The collaboration with the participants, UN Women and PWESCR, was in the same direction, a call on South Asian women to debate and dialogue on alternative economic, financial policies.

**Shalini Yog**  
*Programme Co-ordinator*  
*HBF*

---

<sup>1</sup>UNIFEM has been dissolved and incorporated into the newly established UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

## The Context



*The opening session of the workshop contextualized the issues relating to gendered impacts of the current global financial crisis within a global and a South Asian regional setting, elucidating and assessing the various channels of impact on women and women's rights that the current crisis has created, its varied impact on the social and economic status of women and its implications for pursuing a women's rights agenda.*

### **Women and the Crisis: A Global Perspective**

**Manuel F. Montes**

*Development Strategy and Policy Analysis  
Development Policy and Analysis Division,  
UNDESA, USA*

In assessing the impact of the global economic crisis on women and gender equality, it is important to recognize that this crisis is only the latest version of a series of overlapping crises that have befallen women and other economically marginalized or exploited groups. Attempts at resolving these other crises have laid the ground for subsequent economic crises, that have had serious

impacts on long term efforts to advance equity and solidarity in economic frameworks. In quite a few cases, these crises have been the occasion for setbacks and reversals in social gains previously achieved. However, this crisis also represents opportunities to advance a progressive human rights based agenda as an alternative.

***When the crisis happened the adjustment became adjustment of the victims and there was no culpability on the part of the rich countries.***

***Manuel F. Montes***

Various channels of impact on women and women's rights created by the current crisis, and their implications for pursuing the women's rights agenda could be summarized as follows:

- Women traditionally act as buffers, absorbing the worst impacts of such crises, especially adverse impacts on health, nutrition and education due to rising food and fuel prices and reduced social sector spending. According to World Bank (WB) estimates, from 2009 to 2015, an average of 200 to 400 thousand more infant deaths will happen as a result of the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>World Bank, 2009, *The Global Economic Crisis: Assessing Vulnerability with a Poverty Lens*

- There has been a rapid fall in the share of female labour income, and inequalities of income and wealth have deepened.
- There is a decline in international trade and fall in exports, a reversal of capital flows from developing countries to the developed world, along with a fall in remittances and a rising debt service burden. Women's income and employment in export sector has fallen.
- There is an adverse impact on domestic employment and output, high debt burdens and greater exposure to domestic violence and crime, given the deteriorating social and economic conditions.
- The situation requires more stable economies, less dependence on foreign markets, domestic investment and capable governments to control unstable capital flows and stabilize employment flows.
- The domestic social sector spending on health, education, and social security nets needs to be strengthened to reduce the existing burden on women, with an emphasis on increasing the capabilities of the poor and strengthening a gender balanced approach to development.

## **Women and the Crisis: A Regional Perspective from South Asia**

**Indira Hirway**

*Centre for Development Alternatives, India*

In recent decades, the region of South Asia has tried to attain higher growth through trade integration and economic liberalization, and has been impacted adversely when neo-liberal policies promoting these processes failed globally, as in the current financial crisis. In April 2009, a UNDP funded case study on small enterprises and women workers working in informal sectors in India pointed to the failure of internal policies for crisis management in addressing their problems. External policies, on the other hand, did not address national concerns and development goals. The government needs to be more responsible as basic rights to health, education and food security are being violated, and these violations are affecting the present as well as future generations.

### **Mapping the Current Situation**

- The impact on the financial sector was felt in the form of increased capital outflows, a fall in Foreign

Direct Investment (FDI) and overseas development assistance. Exports fell, exchange rate devaluations took place, and there was a decline in tradable services and a rise in oil prices and prices of essential commodities.

- The indirect impact of this crisis on South Asian countries has been far more severe than the direct impact, as highlighted by the UNDP discussion paper, based on a systematic study of Six Major Sectors in Five States of India<sup>3</sup>. The study highlighted that the indirect impact on the poorer sections of the economy was higher and more serious than generally recognized.

***Women were the main shock absorbers of the crisis. They absorbed the crisis primarily by coming into the workforce.***

***Indira Hirway***

- Women were the major subjects of the impact of this crisis and this has to be understood also in terms of reduction in income, loss of employment and the associated increase in incidence of conflict, domestic violence, depression, suicide etc. A bailout package for women as producers, women as wage earners and women as home makers is essential.

<sup>3</sup>UNDP India Publication, November, 2009, Global Economic Crisis: Impact on the Poor in India – A Synthesis of Sector Studies [http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports\\_publication/ExeSumFinal.pdf](http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports_publication/ExeSumFinal.pdf)

- Return migration associated with the crisis created pockets of poverty. A large number of migrants, when they returned to their village, created a depression in the village economy. The village lost remittances, shops were shut, consumption decreased and there were reductions in the local wage rate resulting from the pressure on the local labour market. At an all India level, it was estimated that out of the 60 million migrant workers, 10 million workers returned back. In Surat, the rate of return migration was as high as 50%.
- There should be universal social protection for workers, employment guarantees to protect unskilled workers, and protection of rights to food, health and education.
- Small producers, who has been the worst sufferers of the crisis, need to be protected through skills training and skills up gradation programmes with increased visibility of their work in statistics and quantitative databases.
- The crisis demonstrated that growth based on globalizing at the lowest level of the value chain was not very useful as it gave no bargaining power to the developing countries in a global market dominated by global production networks of Multinational Corporations (MNCs), which forced cost cutting and wage reductions as means of maintaining

competitiveness. Developmental goals need to be incorporated into industrial policies, commercial policies, labour policies and trade policies.

- The crisis also demonstrated that exports cannot be the engine of growth, because export markets are unreliable and countries with small bargaining power are especially vulnerable. In a crisis, when all countries adopt protectionist measures, even the small markets that are available to such countries are uncertain and unreliable. Trade-induced growth or trade-led growth in itself was not important, but what really mattered was the composition of such growth.
- The need of the hour is to think in terms of expanding domestic markets, an inclusive trade policy for achieving developmental goals and an institutional global policy framework that provides space to national governments for pursuing their developmental goals; focus on social protection, social rights and employment guarantee.
- Regarding the growth model in India, the inclusiveness that the 11th Five Year Plan claims is false. We must think in terms of another growth model that would have at least two components: social security and basic rights as a strategy for development and not as flagship programmes or schemes;

and natural resource management and employment guarantees as part of a labour intensive sustainable development of the economy.

## **Women and the Crisis: A Human Rights Perspective**

**Virginia Gomes**

*UN Committee on ESCR, Portugal*

The human rights based approach to poverty eradication recognizes that marginalization, discrimination, gender inequalities and all forms of exploitation are among the root causes of poverty. Poverty reflects societal failures and the existence of power relations at the local and global levels rather than merely individual circumstances and lack of motivations. From the human rights perspective of universality, indivisibility and interdependence, women's vulnerabilities are grossly increasing across the entire spectrum of rights depending on the economic and social model of the concerned country. It is widely recognized that the benefits of globalization have not been equitably shared among regions, nations and people and the situation has worsened

***Poverty reflects societal failures rather than mere individual circumstances and lack of motivations.***

***Virginia Gomes***

with the crisis. On the contrary, the gap between and within the developed and developing countries has widened in the absence of a needful and equitable distribution of material, technological and

organizational capacities amongst the regions of the world. There has been a weakening of labour rights and social protection systems and despite regional differences, women's issues from the human rights perspective has certain commonalities.

### **Developing the Human Rights Agenda from a Gendered Perspective**

- Socially constructed roles of men and women, or the social differences that are learnt, are a generally recognized source of inequality, and women experience greater obstacles in accessing their basic rights than men. Women have been given unequal roles to play and are often exposed to multiple discriminations resulting from the cumulative, compounded and intersectional effects of discrimination on several grounds.
- Such inequalities resulted in girls and women being in a disadvantaged position in comparison to men, whether it was in relation to education and participation in the labour market, or poverty in general.
- Existing inequalities also mean that in times of crisis, girls and women are at a more disadvantaged position in comparison to men.
- In Export Processing Zones (EPZs), as the global demand for products in the south decreased, the World Trade Organization (WTO) identified

approximately 9% decline in the volume of exports for 2009. Sectors like the textile industry had a workforce where 80% of employees were female. So, low export demand disproportionately affected these women.

- In the context of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), equal rights of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) had been adversely affected. In the experience of the Committee (UN Committee on ESCR), two recurring dimensions in the struggle of any discriminated community are the lack of representation of members of such communities in the decision making process and multiple discriminations faced by women.
- The Committee's basic recommendation was that states should draw up a plan for the eradication of poverty as a core obligation, with clear benchmark indicators to identify the status of women within marginalized groups within general disaggregated statistics. These efforts would not only encapsulate core obligations that guarantee the essential minimum level of each right, but would also ensure effective utilization of available resources by the states.

- Further, three points on the use of maximum available resources are useful in times of crisis, while working toward both a medium term policy for economic recovery, as well as a long term policy addressing consequences of global governance for poorer nations:

1. Firstly, the lack of availability of adequate resources did not alter the urgent necessity of meeting certain obligations, nor did such constraints alone justify inaction.

***What we hear in government agencies is let us get our act first on economic growth and then we can distribute benefits. But it has not worked like that. Regarding social safety nets, we heard the national governments say we don't have the fiscal space to build them. But it is not just a matter of getting fiscal space; it is a matter of fighting for the fiscal space and using it.***

***Virginia Gomes***

2. Secondly, in times of severe resource constraints, states must protect the most disadvantaged and marginalized

members of the society by adopting relatively low cost targeted programmes.

3. Thirdly, out of the several available options, states should adopt the one that least restricted the Covenant's rights, and all steps should be taken to protect the situation of individuals and families, particularly women living in deprivation.

In times of negative national and international environments, it is imperative that the fulfilment of conditions that enable people to live with dignity be grounded on the interdependence of economic and social policies. No clear way forward had emerged based on the fact that the crisis had strong gender dimensions. The opportunities for women to emerge as development agents in a positive sense after the crisis had to be considered. Women also needed to be sufficiently convinced of their power in relation to their own potential, and the work done by PWESCR was important in this regard.

## Comments

Issues discussed included the inefficacy of the Indian Social Security Bill in addressing the issues of informal workers; trade liberalization and rising inequalities within the developing world with creation of enclaves of prosperity; persistence of gender inequities in the agricultural sector despite extensive land reforms; absence of sustainable agriculture as part of an active state policy; failure of the existing growth model and 'trickle-down effect'; and inability to tax the rich and absorb surpluses from the growing sectors to provide for welfare.

- From the human rights perspective, it was important that human rights advocates worked with development economists to ensure governments took their core obligations, in terms of efforts to support and protect the most marginalized, to be of a completely basic nature for implementing economic models.
- The Social Security Bill<sup>4</sup> in India was highly diluted in its current form in that most aspects of the basic package that had been recommended by the National Committee had not

been incorporated; it revealed the lack of political commitment on these issues in India. Where land reforms were concerned, India had still not had the kind of reforms that would make a strong dent on the exploitative social economic structure of rural society. Only then could the model claim to be inclusive.

- The crisis showed that domestic markets had to be developed and dependence on international markets had to be reduced, which meant allowing wages to increase even at the cost of being less internationally competitive, so that more goods and services could be purchased by the masses locally.

***We have not been able to make a dent on the exploitative, socio-economic structure of society. We have done some marginal things which are positive, but these are not adequate at all as far as structural changes are concerned.***

- Not taxing the rich out of fear that growth would be slowed down was unjustified; faster growth was unjustifiable when it was good only for a certain section of the population. Instead, progress should be made on deploying maximum available resources in fulfilling basic rights and obligations.

<sup>4</sup>The Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security Bill 2007 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by the Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Oscar Fernandes. It provides legislative backing to social security schemes like the 'Aam Admi Bima Yojana', National Old Age Pension Scheme and the Health Insurance Scheme. The Parliament passed the Bill in December, 2008

# The Crisis Perspectives from South Asia



## Section I: Food Security, Migration and State Restructuring

*The presentations made and the discussions that followed highlighted several issues related to increased vulnerability of women due to rising food insecurity; distress migration and falling remittances from trade and other international economic activities arising as a consequence of the global financial crisis; and political restructuring. Case studies from Bangladesh, Nepal and India addressed region specific perspectives.*

### Food Security, Microfinance and the Garment Sector: The Crisis in Bangladesh

**Farida Akhter**

*Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona (UBINIG), Bangladesh*

The years from 2007 to 2009 in Bangladesh, have been very difficult because of the effects of global financial crisis on the local economy of the country. For Bangladesh, it is not only the global recession, but also other factors, such as domestic political unrest and natural disasters that add to the existing crisis, and therefore

the effects on people, particularly on women, becomes more complex.

- In Bangladesh, garment exports and flow of remittances had become major foreign exchange earners; however, both were vulnerable to fluctuations in global demand and supply situations, and were adversely affected by the crisis.
- Remittances of overseas workers had increased so significantly that it had become more than what Bangladesh received from the WB, or International Monetary Fund (IMF). Thus Bangladesh could actually do away with their help.
- The share of agriculture in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had always been over 30%. However, it had fallen recently, along with a fall in women's employment in agriculture. This led to women's migration to

***The entire growth model has problem with women. Whatever we do as inclusive, I think women will only become the wives of growth and not growth themselves.***

**Farida Akhter**

the exploitative informal sectors of employment, increasing the double burden of work on women. As for

garment workers, there were about 3 million workers in this sector and these factories were increasingly being located in Dhaka, given their rising significance. The percentage of women workers among the garment industries was 75% in 2001-02 and 85% in 2006-07.

- The female workers in this sector, worked long hours with inadequate breaks and low incomes. After the global financial crisis, export orders fell, factories were closed and thousands of garment workers were left jobless.
- Low wages in the sector were a controversial issue. Factory owners were unwilling to concede to the demands of workers. The wages were one of the lowest in the region, and there were movements for ensuring minimum wages. While the workers demanded 5000 takas<sup>5</sup> (Bangladeshi currency) per month, the owners said they would agree to 3000, and even that they would pay later. One owner actually commented "If I pay now, 5000 or 3000 taka, I cannot buy the Lexus model of car this time".
- As far as the low food intake of garment workers was concerned, after studying the situation for an entire week, it was observed that workers were eating only one full

meal a day and not eating any nutritious food at all. They had been forced to sell even their little black and white television sets and electric fans. Children were dropping out of schools.

- Regarding food security, women had traditionally been responsible for conserving seeds in the interests of biodiversity. Women were not in favour of hybrid seeds and were fighting against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). However, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister and Agricultural Minister promoted Bt Brinjal (genetically modified brinjal cultivars) and tobacco cultivation over food crop cultivation during the winter season, thereby destroying entire food security nets at the household, village and national level.
- Microcredit, for which Bangladesh got the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006<sup>6</sup>, was actually a disaster. It was putting pressure on the poor to repay and was only creating markets for corporate products. Deals were being made with mobile phone companies for microcredit projects, where corporate food like yoghurt was being promoted. Because of microcredit, more suicides were happening amongst the borrowers. People were selling kidneys

and body parts, while household items were being taken away.

- People have their own coping mechanisms and while exploring ways of dealing with the crisis, one must not think only in terms of financial solutions. The coping mechanisms of groups, especially women, should be strengthened.

## **Nepal and the Economic Crisis: Issues and Perspectives**

**Sapana Pradhan Malla**

*Member of the Constituent Assembly, Nepal*

In Nepal, where a new constitution is expected to be adopted by May 2011, it was imperative to make an intervention to address the sufferings of women due to the global economic crisis or other economic and social crises, through special measures and the introduction of a substantial model of equality. In developing strategies, it was important to remember that gender-blind economic policies did not mean that the impact of these policies, in terms of restrictions imposed, exclusions and differences in treatment and other aspects, was gender neutral. No comprehensive study has been done in Nepal on the implications of the global crisis on women.

<sup>5</sup>The international exchange rate is roughly seventy two takas per US dollar.

<sup>6</sup>Professor Muhammad Yunus, 'Banker to the Poor', established the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in 1983, fueled by the belief that credit is a fundamental human right. His objective was to help poor people escape from poverty by providing loans on suitable terms. Professor Yunus and the Grameen Bank were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 "for their efforts to create economic and social development from below".

- A special resolution was moved in early 2010 in the Parliament by an industrialist parliamentarian to address the crisis. The official position, however, was that there was no impact of the crisis on Nepal since it had no global banking network, very limited national insurance network, and they were not significantly integrated with the global market.

***The global economic crisis made us realize that different people suffer differently and for women the implications are different, and therefore their needs and experiences have to be taken into consideration while making any kind of economic policies.***

***Sapana Pradhan Malla***

- After the resolution was moved, a Committee consisting of the Finance Secretary, Advisor to the Finance Ministry and members of the National Planning Commission was formed by the Parliament without a single woman in it. The committee reported that there was a negative balance of payment due to decrease in exports and increase in imports, and also due to decrease in remittances. GDP decreased due to decrease in industrial growth and agricultural product growth.
- Women employed in the export oriented businesses lost their jobs.

The major challenge women were facing was a decrease in agricultural growth. In Nepal, 67% of women were engaged in agricultural self-employment, and 11% were in agricultural paid employment. Foreign employment decreased by 12.1%, FDI decreased from 1.9 to 1.2 billion, exports decreased from 15.8 to 9.8%, inflation rose from 7.5 to 10.5%, and economic growth fell from 5.5 to 3.6%. As a result, there was a decrease in household income, decrease in purchasing power, and a serious effect on livelihoods.

- An IMF study<sup>7</sup> released in 2005 had shown the existence of high economic polarization and huge economic disparities. This led to increase in domestic violence, trafficking, many women were now in the exploitative entertainment industry, more in dance bars, massage parlours, suicide ratios had increased and life expectancy had remained static. While the officially stated figures for migration had decreased, men and women were travelling through illegal channels, and their vulnerability had thus

increased. Recently, 15 Nepali women committed suicide in Lebanon.

- Nepal introduced the Domestic Violence and Punishment Act<sup>8</sup>, and the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill<sup>9</sup>. However, special measures are needed to ensure implementation of these Acts.
- Various laws and policies were being formed in the region like EPZs, Banking Act, and Investment Board Act and there was a need to make these more gender sensitive. For immediate relief, a special budget had also been made and effort was required to make this gender sensitive.
- Nepal was going through a restructuring process and was enacting a new constitution with focus on devolution of powers with creation of a federal structure. Social transformation was one of the main agendas of the upcoming constitution, with questions of bringing about more balanced power relationships, and redistribution of the benefits of access and control over resources being seriously considered. However, there was a need to ensure specific rights for women in the new structure. For instance, there was a

<sup>7</sup>IMF Country Report No. 05/351, September, 2005, *Nepal Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report*

<sup>8</sup>The Domestic Violence and Punishment Act 2065, passed in May 2009 defines physical, mental, sexual, financial as well as behavioural violence as domestic violence.

<sup>9</sup>Nepal Sexual Harassment Bill was passed in October 2009 and proposed institutionalization of punitive measures against sexual harassment in its various manifestations.

specific provision in the constitution that guaranteed right to inheritance and equal rights to sons and daughters. However, even after having these provisions in the constitution, and having accepted these in the upcoming constitution, necessary reforms in the existing property and inheritance rights were yet to be made.

- Nepal had new provisions involving recognition of women's contribution in GDP, and sharing of responsibilities inside the house and taking care of the child within the constitutional framework, along with recognition of reproductive health rights. It was important to take these provisions forward through specific policies.
- Nepal needs to differentiate between non-discrimination and equality. Non-discrimination could not only be prohibitory discrimination but it also had to have a link with special measures for women.

## Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Inequalities Rukmini Rao

*Gramya Resource Centre for Women, India.*

The current crisis is not a new crisis, but a cyclical crisis borne out of the problems with the manner in which production was fundamentally organized all over the world in the form of a patriarchal capitalist mode of production. The current crisis has violated every human right: the right to life due to inadequate nutrition, rising crime and trafficking and female infanticide; the right to work with thousands of women facing continued unemployment; the right to food; and the right to social security.

The global financial and economic crisis has led to a decline in food availability. The macro-economic scenario in India, the fact of a continuing growth rate of 7% and more, hides the increased and increasing vulnerabilities of women and marginalized communities.

Women in the South Asian region, whether it was Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan or India, have since centuries had access to indigenous knowledge that leads to more sustainable agricultural practices, and their practices could be called 'postmodern agriculture'. These women farmers had demonstrated that they could grow enough food; they could grow it organically, and could more effectively address climate change

***The crisis does not impact boys and girls in the same way.***

problems through these practices. There is a need to move beyond social protection to investments that enable women to improve their own knowledge systems, introduce them to new industries and new skills, and thereby build human capacities in the process. What is required is a restructuring of agriculture, with investments in the sector being made available directly to women. We need investment in understanding what the women are doing, and also in learning from them. We have always looked at them as poor and illiterate, whereas they have in fact always been feeding the world.

India is in a horrible situation where we have mountains and mountains of food stocks piled up. There is a right to food campaign in the country, and it was estimated that there are enough stocks to feed 210 million people every year. The country has invested 5.5 billion dollars in growing wheat, and even then our people are hungry.

The country has seen a rise in internal trafficking of young women within the country. Due to rising female infanticide, there were not enough women left in Punjab, and as a result there were news reports about Punjabi men buying girls from Orissa and Kerala with the connivance of their families. Civil society groups that rescued them, never had enough resources for rehabilitation. Where the right to work was concerned,

in the case of garment workers, it meant 500,000 job losses and since the majority of women were in the garment sector, they were the ones who were worst hit and were eating much less. There is also the increasing crisis of food grain—currently only 419 grams are available per person per day. Fuel prices have gone up, so families are cooking meals only once a day. Additionally, women ate last and least, and girls were the first ones to be pulled out of schools.

The fundamental issue that needs to be examined is how we are using the available resources. India is not in as bad a position as the 15 poorest African countries. We have some fiscal space. How are we investing in that space, what are we doing with the resources that we have?

## Comments

Issues discussed included the sectoral crisis in India and distress migration; political and human rights implications of the global crisis, and manipulation of the crisis by governments to consolidate their positions; need for regional policies to ensure that countries interact on an equitable footing; need to bring land reforms and equitable access to resources within the ambit of discussions on food security; the efforts of the Indian Government to engender the 11th Five Year Plan and absence of a land use policy therein; violation of human rights in Pakistan because of debt, aid and the

resultant conditions imposed by the WB and IMF; the need to understand issues related to Free Trade Agreements (FTAs); and the demand of women's groups that international aid for agricultural development be channelized towards promoting sustainable agriculture.

- In India, an agricultural crisis had emerged. Agriculture had become unproductive in terms of costs of input and returns at the peasant community level. This had led to circulatory migration, with people in absence of adequate employment opportunities shifting their entire families away from home for 6-8 months in a year. The effect of the crisis was felt even in the more prosperous states such as Punjab, where more than 30,000 farmer suicides were reported. The situation has fuelled distress migration under the pressure of huge loans, indebtedness, lack of, or total loss of assets, reduced food availability etc. 14-15 year old girls have migrated to states like Rajasthan and Gujarat in search of seasonal work, and are hugely vulnerable to violence and other forms of exploitation, in the absence of safety and social security nets. In the existing discourse on migration, and the debates on the issue, one has to concede to the fact that there are different levels of migration, and high-end migration of the upper segment is totally

different from the distress migration that we have just discussed.

- The larger system itself was at the roots of the crisis that formed the backdrop of the social crisis that we saw in terms of greater violence, food insecurity etc. Hence, coping mechanisms and human rights based approach, which stopped at instituting economic rights within the existing system, could never replace a critique or engagement with long-term policies which were aimed at overhauling the entire system itself. These were not exclusionary and both kinds of interventions could go hand in hand. Surprisingly, even United Nations' (UN) documents were looking at the crisis from a managerial perspective rather than critically engaging with the economic policies that came as part of the neo-liberal political model of democracy and governance.
- There are apprehensions over manipulation of the crisis by governments to further consolidate their own positions. There was a need to look at the political implications of the global crisis, not only on the economy, but also in relation to human rights, democracy and governance. Besides civil society engagement in relation to advocacy and lobbying for promoting food security, promoting a human rights culture had sometimes focused attention away from issues

of democracy and governance, which were important for social transformation and were integral to issues related to the right to development.

- Regional mechanisms such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) were promoting South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which was affecting Sri Lankan farmers adversely. While talking about regional policies, one needs to look at the fact whether the big countries and the smaller countries in South Asia were interacting on an equitable footing. There was a need to review SAFTA and see how it could be reformulated. For instance, given that de-linking with the Indian economy did not seem a viable option for the much smaller Sri Lankan economy, how could a fair share for the Sri Lankan economy be ensured in bilateral trade relations?
- To understand food security, we needed to understand food insecurity. When food insecurity was created, one did not have the means to buy food or produce one's own food. Under such circumstances, the government needs to address two fundamental questions: initiate land reforms, and give equitable access to resources to more farmers. The question then is whether you would

***We conceptually have all the answers to food and security, but no will. How do we create that will?***

provide water to the poor farmers, or would you rather provide it to the Coca-Cola Company? Would you provide land to farmers, or convert 2-3 cropping zones into Special Economic Zones (SEZs) industrial estates? The need was to create an alternate political will. For example, the emergence of a big township on the way from Meerut to Delhi, passing through a very rich alluvial plain, which also had plenty of water, in a region which should ideally have been given over to cultivation, was a criminal act. In Jharkhand, for example, working on the seed rights of farmers demonstrated how delayed procurement of seeds on the part of the government, when the monsoon failed, had led to loss of the crops for farmers. Hence, one needed to enable farmers to have greater control over their seeds.

- The Indian Government, in order to engender the 11th Five Year Plan, had set up a committee with a special Working Group on gender and agriculture headed by a feminist economist. The Working Group had tried to provide land for women, given that 40% of farmers were women farmers, and had also devised a three-pronged strategy to engender different components of the entire agricultural policy. The first was capacity building, that had two

components: one was to address the unpaid work of fuel, fodder, water, health and education. The second component was for infrastructure development, credit and other kinds of infrastructure, and the third was in terms of extension service, skill training, etc. In India, in the 11th Plan, efforts had been made by feminist economists to address questions of women's economic security, governance, etc. The policy of giving over land to women was an important strategy, as it acted as an incentive for increasing agricultural productivity, with women taking special care of such land, much in the way they take care of their children. While developing the approach paper to the 12th Plan, it was very important to introduce a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the promises made implicitly or explicitly in the 11th Plan. The absence of land use policy in the Indian 11th Plan had left a huge scope for land grabs by industrialists and developers through legal means.

- Debt was the fundamental factor which had compromised decision-making at the top where Pakistan was concerned, forcing them to accept the conditions imposed by WB and the IMF, which actively violated human rights, whether one called them social rights, water rights, or economic rights. The Pakistani people could not even look into the

questions of the degree of their indebtedness, and were not consulted on its terms and conditions.

- It is critical to note the importance of the trade issue, given the emergence of FTAs. Many small countries in the region were worried about SAFTA, much in the same way that India was worried about negotiating a FTA with developed countries.

***The history of the World Bank and the IMF is a history of violation of human rights.***

The European Union (EU)-India FTA is being negotiated and it will impact Indian agriculture in a substantial way. Strict Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) will threaten the rights of women farmers to produce and exchange their seeds. There was also talk about strong investment provisions for investor protection, that gave developed countries full access to India's land, water and natural forest resources. Many of these resources were used by Indian

women to sustain themselves and their families.

- A study showed that 70% of the rickshaw pullers in Dhaka city used to be farmers, which in itself was a telling fact about the destruction of the agriculture sector and employment. The entire seed system was also being destroyed, and with the introduction of the new seed system there were no more local varieties. Modern agriculture meant putting more pesticides, more fertilizers and getting more into debt. The kind of agriculture that has been introduced led to 30,000 farmers committing suicide. There were studies which highlighted how male farmers were committing suicide in Punjab because they had to give dowries to their sisters and, as the value of land had gone up in Punjab, the land in hands of women had actually gone

down. As far as the international scene was concerned, the EU had put aside an aid package for support of agriculture in developing countries and women's groups had demanded that sustainable agriculture should be promoted and the money should not go into the hands of the WB but instead it should go in the hands of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other UN bodies, which were actually supporting development of farmers. As far as monitoring such projects was concerned, it was essential that the monitoring committees be grounded in peoples' movements, and involves public monitoring alongside technical monitoring. Generating jobs for women does not necessarily translate into economic rights for them. In times of crisis, women are the first to lose their jobs while men are increasingly seen as the legitimate holders of the jobs.

## Section II: Trade, Social Security, Conflict and Economic Rights

*The focus of the session was on trade, the first and main channel through which the economic and financial crisis hit the South Asian economies. The key issues raised were the feminization of labour, feminization of poverty and women's employment in the trade sector. A main characteristic of employment in this sector is that it is casual, informal and volatile in nature because of its dependence on exports. Thus, the situation was inevitably aggravated during a crisis. There were huge wage disparities in women's occupations because women were considered to be a more flexible workforce; they were seen as having less of a voice, while their economic rights were not clearly defined. Hence, they could be used as a buffer to adjust to volatilities of trade related demands.*

## Migration, Conflict, Free Trade Zones, Employment, Social Security and Women Sri Lanka: A Case Study

**Nimalka Fernando**

*International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism, Sri Lanka*

- Sri Lanka is a 'woman's country' where, out of a total population of 20 million, 52% are women. 80% of the Sri Lankan migrant population in the Gulf and other countries consists of women. Of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)<sup>10</sup> again, 80% are women. In the conflict zones of Sri Lanka in the north and east, it was estimated by the Parliament that there were 48,000 single women who were not called 'widows' and 'war widows'. According to official statistics, 23% of Sri Lankan households were single women households. No census has been conducted in the north-east since 1982. In the Sri Lankan

Free Trade Zone (FTZ) consisting of about 300,000 employees, 75% were women; in the plantation sectors i.e. tea, rubber and coconut, again the majority of the workers were women.

- Sri Lankan women have borne not just the burden of the financial crisis, but also the burden of the Tsunami, as well as the burden of the war. The war has completely destroyed the livelihoods of women, both Tamils and Sinhalese, and marginalized them.

***The livelihoods of the women in the north and the east, farmers and peasants, have been totally devastated and the impact of the crisis would be fully felt in the coming years.***

***Nimalka Fernando***

- The country has witnessed a feminization of poverty<sup>11</sup>, with welfare cuts and the burden of education increasingly on the shoulders of women. Women have been articulating their positions on the streets, holding joint demonstrations with FTZ workers, demonstrations

<sup>10</sup>IDPs are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFviewer.html?docid=47949f912&query=Internally%20displaced%20persons%20definition>

<sup>11</sup>The term "feminization of poverty" was first used in 1978 by a researcher named Diana Pearce, who had found that two-thirds of poor adults over age sixteen in the United States were female. Although Pearce was referring specifically to U.S. data, the term entered common usage in both poverty research and women's studies. The concept of feminization of poverty is used as a short hand for a variety of ideas. It can mean either one or a combination of the following- women compared to men have a higher incidence of poverty; women's poverty is more severe than men's; and over time, the incidence of poverty among women is increasing compared to men. Compiled from <http://eco.ieu.edu.tr/wp-content/GenderandPoverty.pdf> and <http://www.libraryindex.com/pages/2687/Women-Children-in-Poverty-FEMINIZATION-POVERTY.html>

over human rights violations, demonstrations for higher wages, campaigns against night work, anti-privatization campaigns etc. There were efforts within the FTZs to resist the formation of small groups and despite such restrictions; *We in the Free Trade Zone* was formed along with various women's centres.

- The Most Favoured Nation (MFN) agreement affected Sri Lanka only marginally because the Sri Lankan garment industry was now a designer industry with no mass production. The major contention however was that the cost of living had gone up, with the increase in petrol and diesel prices. The government subsidized the public sector but the private sector remained frozen. Sri Lanka is very rich with regard to migrant earnings that remained substantial despite some decline post-crisis. Welfare expenditure was cut, but Sri Lanka survived with the war economy. The budget for defense for 2010 was raised to Sri Lankan Rs. 201 billion as against Rs.177 billion in 2009, while for economic development only Rs.60 billion were allocated. Many people were recruited into the armed forces. These included young boys and peasants from rural areas, and return migrants from the Middle East. The effect of the financial crisis, in terms of loss of employment, was thus compensated to a great extent in Sri Lanka with the generation of

employment due to the war economy. The war economy also sustained the economy with infrastructure development and rural poverty alleviation.

- The main focus of women's organizations in Sri Lanka was on civil and political rights; struggles for economic, social and cultural rights had been subsumed within the

civil and political rights movement, largely due to the ongoing conflict. It is important for Sri Lanka to join this discussion, because the country has coped with two disasters in the recent past, i.e. the Tsunami and the military conflict, and it is important to ensure that the women's rights framework, as well as the broader human rights framework is

## Experiences of Garment Workers in Sri Lanka

### **Padmini Weerasooriya**

*Ex factory worker and trade union leader*

Sri Lanka had around 800 factories in the FTZ, and of these 80% was associated with the garment industry. It was women from the rural areas who migrated into this zone to work. There were about one million dependants upon the labour force in the FTZ. The problem areas in the FTZs with regard to women's employment were housing, health, wages and production target challenges. According to research conducted by the Labour Department in 2008, 60% of the women workers suffered from anaemia or anaemic conditions. Forming trade unions had been a major challenge inside the FTZ, though it was not legally prohibited. After 30 years, due to a strike action by the workers, in the case of Star Garments, 3000 (90%) of whose workers were women, the owners were compelled to give them space to form a trade union. When the world economic crisis happened, the owners reduced transport facilities and food subsidies given to workers and cut back on the overtime payment. They also dismissed workers and folded up certain sections, while burdening existing workers with more work. In one case, in a factory the owners stopped giving workers sugar for their tea. The companies did not see any decrease in their profits during the economic crisis. Statistics of export earnings showed that 45% came from the garment sector. As a result of the economic crisis, when some of the factories in the Middle East closed down, around 50,000 workers lost their jobs and returned to Sri Lanka. During the recent presidential and parliamentary elections, workers were promised a hike of Rs. 2500 in salaries but these promises have not been fulfilled.

woven into the rehabilitation and resettlement processes.

- However, the post conflict concern was that the government might not have sufficient resources to sustain this process of employment generation and rural development and ensure welfare of IDPs. The situation had worsened as the EU had withdrawn the tax concession granted to Sri Lanka based on its performance and compliance with labour laws, environmental laws and human rights. Women were not coming into the FTZ because there was a wage freeze.
- An agreement with the WB was being negotiated but it was not discussed with the people or tabled in the Parliament. In the north and east, developmental projects were tied to India. Improvement of the Palali airport in the north and the railway line were undertaken with India's help, while China was developing Sri Lankan ports in the south. All this would shape how international and regional power dynamics would govern the Sri Lankan economy. There were WB experts sitting inside the Finance Ministry, drafting all the policy papers and drafting their domestic budgets.

## **Free Trade Zones, Employment, Social Security: A Survey of Two Zones in Sri Lanka**

**B. Skanthkumar**

*Law and Society Trust, Sri Lanka*

A survey was undertaken at the end of 2009 by a group of women activists working with FTZ workers and the Law and Society Trust in Colombo, Sri Lanka, based on questions devised by Women's Centres to assist them in future campaigns. It covered two zones - the Kattanayaka zone in the north of Colombo where the airport was situated, and another in the south at the bottom of Koggalan Island.

When the Centre activists went from one boarding house (lodgings of the workers) to another to speak with workers, they faced enormous resistance because of the pervasive fear of the management discovering that workers were speaking to activists. The workers were unable to distinguish between the global crisis and the crisis they were experiencing. By 2007 and 2008 the rate of inflation had averaged 26% and reached the peak of 29% a month. This reflected the enormous burden of cost of living on these workers. Where job losses were concerned, the industry cited the figure of 30,000, though trade unionists gave a figure of 300,000 jobs lost. In the

statistics of the Labour Department, in terms of the FTZs, the net loss was only 7,000 over 2008-09. There was a situation even before the crisis where you had at least 15,000 vacancies and a high turnover. Every month a turnover of about 5-10% was recorded in each factory. The level of exploitation was such that people could not cope with work and those who had options, could not stand it and left. So there were vacancies of about 12,000 to 15,000.

As a result of the crisis, factories closed down and workers moved within the zone to other factories. They then started moving outside the zone to large

***What was happening in the garment sector in the FTZs was what had always happened, in that the crisis became an opportunity for capitalism to reproduce itself in many ways.***

***B. Skanthkumar***

factories and also to sub-contractors for work, which was worse, given the nature of contractual jobs. The survey concluded that there were sections of labourers who had informal work; there were those who were unable to find work, and those who had funds so that they could remain in and around the zones and look forward to better employment opportunities.

On the issue of compensation, in October 2009, 70% of those who lost jobs were able to find work fairly soon after they had lost it and 30% were still looking for work. There was a

statutory formula for compensation that was binding, but the employers were not honouring the compensation formula, and the Labour Department that was supposed to regulate it came to an informal agreement with the employers, where they turned a blind eye to this. The reality was that only 26.6% workers received compensation according to the formula. Many did not get it according to the statutory formula and some received it at the discretion of the employers, some did not receive the compensation at all, and others were engaged in legal proceedings for compensation.

The survey also analyzed the extent to which women had themselves benefited from their own experience after three decades of the establishment of the FTZs. The situation in Sri Lanka was one where the basic wage of a garment worker was 50% of what the lowest grade worker in the public sector got. So if an unskilled labourer in the public sector got around Rs. 12,000, the garment worker's basic wage was around Rs. 6000, which was clearly insufficient. They had to top it up through overtime, long hours, night time and weekend work.

The first casualty of the crisis was cutting back on overtime wages, while retaining the overtime hours. The Labour Department continued to tolerate it because of the threat of retrenchment by owners and employers. The second casualty was the free meals because

of which the quality of workers' diet suffered. The employers stopped providing meat and eggs and instead provided only the cheapest vegetables that were repeated over and over again. So employers were using the crisis as an opportunity to roll back the benefits that the workers had won through hard struggle over the previous decades. Employers got rid of workers who were seen as trouble makers, activists and workers who wanted to form trade unions. Hence the crisis had not in any way created challenges for the existing structures of production and manufacturing, nor even for the structure of labour management or labour relations.

## **Economic Rights and Social Security in Pakistan**

**Najma Sadeque**

*Shirkat Gah, Pakistan*

It was not the current economic crisis that ruined Pakistan. The country's ruin was brought about by circumstances rooted in its own past. The situation was only aggravated by the intervention of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), World Trade Organization (WTO), US Government, 9/11, military aid, etc. Pakistan had witnessed long decades of military government, had experienced US hegemony, and even puppet democratic regimes propped up by the Americans. But the key factor behind Pakistan's ruin was its feudal set up.

There were about 600 feudal families, who owned the prime agricultural land in Pakistan. The second biggest owner of agricultural land was the military. From colonial times, all the cantonment land or open land, which was later used for agricultural purposes, remained under military control and none of it had been given back to the civilian government. 60% of Pakistan's economy was based on agriculture, but the entire sector did not pay any tax. The manufacturing sector, whose share in the economy was 19%, paid 51% of the total taxes. Out of 175 million people in Pakistan there were only 2½ million tax-payers, although the economists were of the opinion that at least 10 million people were eligible to pay tax. Pakistan has a government that has always been parasitical.

A further problem was the network of socio-economic and political relationships that had been established over time through kinship and other ties such as marriage. Through marriage, the rich and the elite had formed a civil, military, political and feudal nexus and as a result, there was no development in the rural areas at all. Living standards had fallen drastically.

Land records in Pakistan are maintained like state secrets to which researchers cannot have access because then they would find out who owns how much. Two attempts at land reforms had both failed. The *lambardar* (village headman) and *patwari* (keeper of land records and revenue statistics), were under the

direct authority of the feudal elite. In Sindh and Punjab it was the local feudal lords and not the government that ruled. Two-thirds of the parliamentarians in the present elected government are feudal landlords.

Assassination was a very common form of dealing with inconvenient problems in Pakistan, not only in feudal areas but also in the urban areas. In the manufacturing sectors, there are no labour laws. Long before WTO came in i.e. around 25 years or so, under the contract system there was no obligation to give minimum facilities for health, transport, etc. The contract system spread like a disease and transferred all responsibilities away from the main manufacturer.

The state of poverty in the country is such that 40 years back the poor people from the north used to eat *roti* (round, unleavened bread) and *chai* (tea). Now *chai* has become very expensive because it requires milk and sugar. In Sindh and Punjab they eat bread and since they cannot even afford vegetables, because for cooking vegetables you need fuel, cooking oil and spice, they make pickles and if they cannot afford pickles, they use *dhania* (coriander), *pudina* (mint) etc and make a *chutney* (a thick sauce used as a condiment). If they are lucky to own livestock then they will have *roti* with milk or curd. Such a state of poverty exists even now and has in fact become progressively worse.

According to ILO figures, Pakistan has one million bonded labours, and they get just barely half to eat. Ever since the export orientation began, i.e. three to four decades ago, the government stopped maintaining food reserves. We have to rewrite our economy from scratch because the World Bank and IMF are jumping in. When there is a disaster these money lenders are ready and waiting to trap you again.

Women workers were not organized. Women would remain contract workers even after working in the same factory for 20-30 years. After every eleven months they would get dismissed, remain unemployed for one month, and again be engaged as contract labour. This was the standard practice. In effect, employers did not need to worry about health services, insurance, transportation etc. We have a few thousand members in the labour unions but because women are doubly burdened, they are not very visible and effective.

## Coir, Cashew, Fisheries and Handloom in Kerala: State Response to the Crisis

Mridul Eapen

Kerala State Planning Board, India

### The Context

- Kerala is more integrated with the world economy than many other states of India. There is high export of agro industrial products like coir, cashew, handloom, fish, pepper, coconut and spices. It has a large immigrant workforce located primarily in the Middle East, and to some extent in the US and UK. It is also emerging as a major tourism centre.
- Post crisis, there was a decline in the demand for many commodities being exported to the world market, and the prices were on a downward trend in general. However, the standard discourse focused primarily on the decline in exports and job losses in general, while the impact on women workers, who dominated certain export industries, did not receive much attention.
- Most industries in the state are export oriented and employ a large number of women. These are labour intensive industries and cashew and coir were part of global chains in which women workers were concentrated in the lower rungs of the labour hierarchy. From very early

times, Kerala had tried to organize these unorganized sectors by establishing welfare funds. So most of these industries had welfare funds in which there were provisions for some social security like pension, education for children, unemployment benefits, etc.

## Policy Response

As soon as the crisis of August 2008 began, the Kerala government appointed a small committee and the Centre for Development Studies was asked to do a study to find out the possible impact of the crisis. The study<sup>12</sup> showed that there were six channels of transmission of the global crisis into the local economy. These were remittance inflows; availability of credit from the banking system; export of certain specific items from the state; tourist arrivals; prices of intermediate inputs; and prices of imported raw materials and finished goods. The focus of the study was on the exports of certain specific women intensive export oriented sectors.

In the Coir Industry, exports had increased from Rs. 352 crore<sup>13</sup> in 2002-03 to Rs. 592 crore in 2007-08. Exports account for almost 43% of

production in Kerala. After the crisis exports are expected to decline by at least 20% in the short run; two biggest mat buyers closed down; there was cancellation of orders by a number of retailers, increasing incidence of delayed payments and perhaps 32,000 workers out of work (out of a stated workforce of 3.62 lakh<sup>14</sup> workers of which 82% are women) mostly in the spinning sector.

In the Cashew Industry in the government sector, women were not thrown out of work but work declined, especially for women workers in grading. They do not work in any other occupation but may work in other private cashew companies where the minimum wage is usually given; perhaps even a little more, but no other benefit like bonus is given. Shellers have a slight advantage

being in short supply. In the private sector definitely units are being asked to cut down working days to three and to give a uniform wage, in particular to shellers and not compete among themselves; some women reported going for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) work; 18,000 workers likely to be affected of a workforce of 2.5 lakh workers, of whom 95% are women.

Reduction in export demand came together with a credit squeeze, with banks acting cautiously, and hence there was a further reduction in exports. Similarly, there was a decline in exports of marine products, handlooms, home textiles, furnishings, readymade garments etc. leading to further loss of employment. A survey done in 2009 among workers in each of these sectors revealed that a combination of policies such as price support, purchase guarantee, guaranteed work for women etc could be adopted to ameliorate the situation.

Since 2010, there has been an increase in plan outlays for value addition, exploring the domestic market and ensuring adequate days of employment to the women workers and adopting cost reduction methods wherever possible without generating unemployment. As part of the Left government's different approach to the industrial development of the state, as laid down in the 11th Plan, the emphasis this time was on the need for state support and protection to agro-processing rural industries in the sector that had been adversely affected, first by liberalization policies and then by the recession. Allocations for the Cashew Industry went up from

***Kerala responds fast to the problem of workers. This is historic. Mridul Eapen***

<sup>12</sup>Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, December, 2008, *Global Financial Crisis and Impact on the Kerala Economy: Impact and Mitigation Measures* <http://www.esocialsciences.com/data/articles/Document1212009460.3666193.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>One crore equals to ten million; one hundred lakhs, especially of rupees, units of measurement, or people.

<sup>14</sup>One lakh equals to a hundred thousand units of measurement, especially of rupees or people.

Rs. 2 crore to Rs. 52 crore, while the allocations for the Coir Industry increased from Rs. 19 crore, to 79 crore. Handloom and *khadi* (a coarse homespun cotton cloth made in India) village industries similarly experienced a substantial increase in the outlays from 2010 onwards.

The major areas in which outlays were made in 2009-10 within each of these

sectors were as follows- for the Coir Industry, a price fluctuation fund of Rs. 10 crore to give subsidies for the difference in the market price and the cost of production so that they can sell at whatever price they get in the market; for the Cashew Industry, funds were given for value addition while putting an emphasis on the domestic market. This was a big shift that the Government attempted towards targeting the domestic market. Additionally, funds were given to supply working capital for procurement of nuts from farmers.

Similarly, measures were taken for stimulating the domestic markets for handlooms. These included purchasing school uniforms in non-government and aided schools from handloom units, making it mandatory for children in such schools to wear handloom uniforms at least twice a week, and for men and women in all government offices to wear handloom cloth at least once a week. In case of Fisheries, there was a

***From 2010 onwards there has been a substantial increase in the outlays. These outlays will finance a range of anti-crisis activities.***

***Mridul Eapen***

Rs. 10 crore budgetary support to relieve the distress of the fishing folks, which had four components- cold storage chains at the landing stage of fishing harbours, where they could store their fish if they were not able to sell it; livelihood support, which meant that if

they wanted to diversify to anything else they could; for value addition they had started a plant which made fish curry and a fish drying plant, where they could dry their fish in a very hygienic way along with marketing assistance.

In 2009-10, there was a slowdown in the state's growth rate but things were certainly not as bad as had been feared at one stage. The biggest fear-of return migrants- did not come true. Exports declined but the home market somehow suddenly grew. However, the crisis took a new turn as a new bubble arose in the food grain market, with all prices skyrocketing. So, a lot of initiatives were accordingly taken on the food front. The government responded with three steps that were not specific to any sector. First was the restoration of the Public Distribution System (PDS). All Below Poverty Line (BPL) families were provided ration rice at Rs. 2 per kg, and they included some categories like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) and fishing folks. Rs. 6400 crore had gone

into the food security project. The health insurance scheme which was started by the national government under the name Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) was expanded beyond the Planning Commission BPL. They called it Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. It covered the Planning Commission's BPL of about 12 lakh, and this year it was going to cover at least another 10 lakh families. Kerala's stimulus package was thus an investment in things that would increase the purchasing power of the people, rather than giving money to the banks.

## The Global Financial Crisis and Women Artisans: A Forgotten Lot Traditional Artisans in South Asia – An Overview

Julie George

*Skillshare, India*

- Artisans form a significant portion of the informal economy, commonly referred to as the unorganised sector. There are 22 million artisans in India alone, with about 6 million in the handloom sector; crafts is the largest employer, next only to agriculture; and 80% of work is done by women; yet they are 'invisible' in their work.
- US\$1500 million worth of exports come from the artisan sector annually. However, this is controlled mostly by capitalist traders and the real producers do not get a fair share.
- In 2009-10, export of Nepali handicrafts suffered a decline of 8.11%. According to the Federation of Handicraft Associations of Nepal (FHAN), handicraft exports amounted to Rs. 2.78 billion in the fiscal year 2009-10, compared to Rs. 3.02 billion in 2008-9.

### History of Crisis

- New economic policies and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) driven by the IMF and the WB forced large numbers of artisans out of jobs and

into starvation deaths and suicides in the late eighties and the early nineties.

- With no access to productive resources and markets, many women weavers have turned to active sex work to support families, resulting in a rise in HIV/AIDS incidences and abandoned/orphaned street children.
- Those who already had the wherewithal and access to productive resources grabbed the markets, turning traditional artisans into mere piece-rate earners or bonded labourers.
- Displaced self-employed artisans have been transformed into unskilled migrants; migrant artisans resorted to other forms of informal labour like pulling rickshaws or selling balloons. Women became domestic maids in metros, thus ending age-old traditions and cultures; and children increasingly entered labour markets, especially in HIV/AIDS-affected zones.

### The Current Crisis

- Most enterprises suffered because of globalization; the Indian handicraft market suffered a greater loss with cheap Chinese products glutting the market; women solely dependent on home-based work faced the worst brunt.

- Shortage of finance, obsolete technology, influence of western culture, changing fashion trends and unstable markets, as well as social and political influences has led to irreversible poverty.
- Cases of tuberculosis, asthma, nerve weakness, eye-strain and body ache have risen steeply among the present generation of weavers and these are

also manifesting themselves at an earlier age; many women undergo hysterectomies at 35-40 years old, forced to work for 12-14 hours a day.

***Globalization has simply marginalized the 'have-nots' further, especially women in the informal sector. The question is who is making the money. Is it the artisans or the traders and where do women fit in here.***

*Julie George*

- Economic recession in the nineties cut short even the tiny markets available to small producers; there is actually a dearth of markets but whatever limited markets are available, including 'fair trade organizations', are controlled by a few big players; work is mostly subcontracted to artisans, who are yet to be organized; Fair Trade is not practiced in earnest by anyone.
- A majority of women home-based workers, traditional artisans and weavers, have been particularly hard hit by the Asian financial crisis; an increase in women performing home-based work; the lesser women are organized the better profits MNCs make.

- Women often employed predominantly in the informal sector, perform 'a-typical' or part-time work, are under-employed or are not paid at all. Unremunerated work, usually in the form of household or voluntary work, is a critical form of women's work, but is almost universally uncounted; unpaid work is performed virtually entirely by women.
- The financial and economic crisis of 2008 had gender-specific impacts and placed a disproportionate burden on women, particularly poor and migrating women. Even though both men and women are affected by job losses, women lead the first – you can hire them last and dismiss them first because traditionally men are considered to be the breadwinners. They do not want to be jobless so they are retained, and the women are kicked out. Drop in remittances by family members also affects women's autonomy and control over family members.
- Craft sector growth has either slowed down or has been stagnating, leaving little scope for primary producers to access and control the volatile markets; women already in the lower rungs of the value chains have less bargaining power.
- Drop in informal sector demand impacts women traditional artisans, weavers as economic crises tend to significantly reduce the demand for their products; reduced access to

finance arising from liquidity problems in the financial sector affects women worst, as they are the majority of clients of microfinance institutions (85% of the poorest 93 million clients of MFIs in 2006).

- Increased stress, resulting from sheer lack of food and financial security, leads to an increase in incidents of violence against women, and even communal violence because it is a fight for survival.
- Currently, there is no strategic focus in the international development sector on sustenance and revival of traditional artisan culture, lifestyles, products and services; interventions are more geared towards charity, with a purely welfare approach, not one of empowerment.
- Corporate-led globalization, skewed economic growth and policies that do not reflect poverty factors of the country; the 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA) approach to corporate led capitalism, and the type of globalization it signifies, in short, there is a TINA syndrome in development discourse.
- Entry of MNCs into all sectors has only reduced genuine producers from a state of being skilled workers to bonded labourers with no economic and social security; in the absence

of conducive policies, women have been further marginalised, given their already existing invisibility.

- Conducive institutional mechanisms for collective bargaining, like Parallel Coop Acts, are vehemently opposed by politicians and bureaucrats; current policies and structures not conducive to revive and empower traditional artisans.
- SAFTA had come into effect on January 1, 2006 but it was far

***In the absence of supportive policies, men rather than women benefit from economic growth. Economic growth and public support are equally dispensable to gender equality in the world.***

***Julie George***

from clear that it would protect the interests of small producers against private traders.

## **A Policy Agenda**

- Get more space for women artisans in the SAARC forums;
- Facilitate trade coalitions in the region especially among women artisan groups;
- Convert services and products like credit and resources to create maximum impact for women;
- Invest in primary producer market; encourage use of ICDS; encourage transfer of skills and marketing export services;

- As development practitioners, we are constantly making mistakes and thinking micro when it comes to women. We needed to move away from microcredit, micro enterprise, etc. to large-scale ventures that put enough money and resources in the hands of our small producers, artisans and crafts persons.

## Comments

Issues discussed included need for a comprehensive social security package in the entire region; need for a combined effort in the entire region to decide on a common minimum wage; the desirability of nation states to protect citizen's rights in the context of FTAs; need for alternate strategies of development in terms of policies of WTO; Indian Government's poor track record in terms of implementation of labour laws and the need for comprehensive labour reforms; feudalism and reverse feudalism in Pakistan; Debt Relief Commission and price stabilization measures in Kerala; need for a cluster development approach and cooperative movement in India to link producers with modern marketing techniques; revival of handicrafts in Pakistan; and models of empowering artisans.

- Kerala's example showed that knee-jerk responses, especially in regard to long-term social security issues, were not going to work. It highlighted the role that policy can play. Kerala had a long term plan and it was much

easier for them to double the plan allocations and deal with the crisis. In the region, with some exception in case of Sri Lanka, there had not been any substantial concerted effort towards putting in a comprehensive social security package.

- The government of Kerala financed the measures mentioned above through market borrowings and mobilization of existing rates of taxation along with a few luxury taxes that were the chief source of funds for the programmes initiated. As far as Kerala was concerned, it was the first state where a Debt Relief Commission was established, bringing an end to farmer suicides. The government had also undertaken price stabilization of essential commodities and started large schemes such as EMS housing scheme as part of the stimulus package.
- Kerala's case also shows that the biggest challenge is to sensitise the government to make an intervention; not an intervention on behalf of industry and bailout packages for them, but some kinds of livelihood packages for those who are affected. After the financial crisis all the business chambers of commerce were talking about stimulus package for themselves but there was nothing for the livelihood support for the workers or anybody who had suffered.

- India has been negotiating an EU-India FTA. The EU used to give preferential access to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and many other countries in the region. Now these countries are scared that once EU India FTA is signed, India will get 'equal access' for similar products being produced by other countries that could adversely affect their exports. South-south cooperation was repeating the paradigm of north-south cooperation with the richer and more powerful countries in the south behaving in a similar manner towards least developing countries exactly as the north had with them.

***To meet that gap between jobs and economic rights for women and vulnerable workers, there is a need to have long term policy in place.***

- It is important to understand the dangers of FTAs, given the unequal nature of the partnership and issues of public procurement, labour standards stating that the way forward was not trade alliances and trade led growth but incorporation of developmental goals into our development paradigm i.e. trade policy. The contrast between Gujarat and Kerala, despite being one of the fastest growing states in India with a 11-12% rate of growth in the last few decades, adequate policy response targeted at marginalized groups were not forthcoming from the Gujarat government when the rate of growth fell to 3.5% during the crisis with the government stating

that it could provide food to only half the BPL families based on Central Government's allocations. There is no Planning Commission or Planning Board in Gujarat and while many states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh saw Gujarat as the role model, the real model should have been Kerala.

- South-south cooperation in the presence of competition and export orientation was not possible given the current model of development, until a common understanding on alternate strategies of development emerged such as saying no to trade in agriculture on terms laid down by developing countries under WTO.
- The successive drafts of consultations on the India-EU FTA progressively led to a toning down of aspects related to labour and human rights and a domination of trade related issues. The role of the nation state in protecting its citizens was important.
- No country will implement labour standards because of the fear of losing markets and jobs. It was a race to the bottom and the cost was transferred to the workers. Some alliances were formed within South Asia, which talked about floor wages because wages kept decreasing. This was to prevent a country gaining at the expense of another and a combined effort was needed to decide on at least a common minimum wage.

- It was not simply a question of labour standards being imposed from outside, but also the fact was that the Indian government was not implementing its own labour laws in large parts, neither in terms of working hours and working days nor in terms of minimum wage or leave regulation. A huge informal sector is rising within the formal sector. Retrenchment and closure laws were being revised continuously, raising the bar for the number of workers in factories or units which could close down without permission from 100-300 to up to 1000 workers now. Anti-labour regulations were being pushed in the name of 'labour reforms'.
- On the issue of feudalism in Pakistan the importance of looking at things from a historical perspective where what might appear as the continued existence of 'feudalism', might actually be a transformation in social relations where the old and new forms of relations of production might be brought together in a new context in a manner dictated and shaped by external forces such as globalization and liberalization was highlighted. How could rising fiscal deficits be sustained in the case of donor aid, as India was one of the biggest recipients of donor aid and further, what were the issues that this raised?

***We are all getting trapped in the growth paradigm. But we are not looking at how it changes, or does not change relations of production and therefore does not move towards democratization of society.***

- Pakistan's own agricultural production had not been enough to meet its needs, largely due to production of cash crops by big landlords and a policy of export orientation which had led to the country's own crops being re-imported at higher prices during a crisis after they had been sold in advance. Recently, a reverse feudalism had taken place with businessmen and industrialists putting all their money in agricultural land and fudging figures and statements to escape taxation. The country also witnessed takeover of land for corporate farming, with agricultural land being increasingly sold to foreign investors, and removal of caps on maximum holdings.
- Pakistan's intends to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with the caveat that they do not want any international monitoring.
- There are no women's countries from the perspective of power and countries are women's countries only in terms of sufferings of women.
- While globalization had led to a decline in production, export, income, etc for the sector, handlooms and handicrafts were still very important

to India in terms of providing employment and livelihoods, and they had huge markets even in the modern economy. They were linked to the rich heritage and culture of the country and were also environment friendly and hence important from the point of view of sustainable development. There were two positive measures that needed to be further strengthened. One was that we have to think in terms of cluster<sup>15</sup> development in a very systematic manner. One such cluster was in Chanderi. The artisans here were moving towards unskilled work because skilled work was not giving them enough income. So, an organization called Entrepreneurship Development Institute, approached the government of India and a cluster for the Chanderi weavers was granted in that area. Secondly, though the cooperative movement in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was ridden with several problems, there were some other new models emerging in the country that were giving positive results. For example the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Anokhi, Desi and Fab India were trying to connect local people with modern marketing and processes, not for exports alone but also for Indian markets. There were some problems in these models

but they were trying to link primary producers and traditional producers with modern marketing techniques, and these efforts needed to be developed further.

- In Pakistan, handicrafts were dying because of very poor support and also because they were typically geared to the tourist industry, which was limited and dwindling in Pakistan. It had been projected in a workshop that handicrafts and artisan work together was capable of providing most of their household needs and hence they needed to be revived.
- Where the new models of empowering artisans were concerned, I do not agree with the model Fab India was promoting because it was a single person who owned many stores, and they had also been exploiting artisans. SEWA was a movement of producers that was promoting cooperatives which were parallel cooperatives and hence was a better model. The state run cooperatives actually interfered with governance. There were only ten states that had entered into the parallel act that should be pushed as it promoted cooperatives that were run by members only. Lots of capacity building needs to be

done to bring women on board while educating members on their rights and duties. Looking at the case of Dilli Haat while discussing issues of market access, she pointed out that rampant corruption had blocked access of artisans to the market; traders of Chinese goods were selling their wares by bribing officials of Delhi Tourism Department.

***A basic human right i.e. right to food, if it has to be protected, then we must say "no trade in agriculture to be imposed by the so called developed countries on others".***

Genuine producers never got a chance to access the market. Though India has some of the best policies in the world, the problems lay with their implementation and monitoring.

- Human rights are not to be addressed only by the poor or by the governments of the rich countries, but also by the so called developed countries which are pressurizing and actually forcing governments of the third world countries to violate all the rights and becoming good guys in front of media and blaming the developing countries like India and China for their unwillingness to address human rights violations.

<sup>15</sup>"A cluster is a sectoral and geographical concentration of small/medium enterprises facing common opportunities and threats." Source: <http://www.unido.org/index.php?id=5780>

# Conflict and Issues of International Aid Experiences from Afghanistan



*This session of the workshop focussed on the situation in Afghanistan, the in-conflict, out-of- conflict and back- into- conflict situation, the impact of the conflict on women, as well as the failure of international aid in rebuilding the economy of the country and improving the conditions of women.*

***Aid is big business not only for the corporations but also for international lending agencies.***

***Najma Sadeque***

## **Afghanistan: A Case Study** **Massouda Jalal**

*Jalal Foundation, Afghanistan*

While the period of the current global, financial and economic crisis is a time of grave financial and political instability, the commitment to human rights, which had been made by all countries in the world, should not be forgotten or set aside because of financial concerns. Financial insecurity coupled with political insecurity in Afghanistan, had further limited the chances of young girls to engage meaningfully with the outside world as business owners, doctors, teachers or

politicians. The Taliban had denounced international peace building efforts and wanted to build a more stable Afghanistan under its totalitarian rule. It continued to harass, intimidate and murder women who breached medieval codes of behaviour for having jobs, for having friends and for having lives. The Taliban was expected to enlarge its presence under the peace deal, and reintegrate insurgents into civilian areas. This will compromise human rights of women, and turn into a huge defeat for the women of Afghanistan. It was imperative to insert women's rights and human rights into the agendas for all such conferences, at the international, national and local levels. Human rights must be reconciled with the security and economic strategy of Afghanistan.

***In Afghanistan they are ready to share power with the Taliban but not with women. Nobody is talking of dividing political power between men and women. Since women do not have power, they are not cared for.***

***Massouda Jalal***

As very few governments would meet the targets set by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, it

becomes all the more important that governments reiterate their commitment to human rights. Governments around the world should not forgo their pledges to human rights in the interest of temporary security- financial or military. Most crucially, the general contraction in financial activity in the world must not translate into a reduction of social and political investments in the future of young girls and women. Women in politics and in leadership are the key to changing the culture of corruption, injustice and impunity. In any financial climate, this was the best strategy for peace and security.

Afghanistan has seen three decades of war and conflict because of which the situation of women has worsened further in several ways.

- After 9/11, the UN Gender-related Development Index<sup>16</sup> showed that the position of Afghan women was still the second worst in the world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) survey<sup>17</sup> showed that 89% of the Afghan women were illiterate.
- 68% of marriages in Afghanistan were forced marriages. If a man killed somebody in the family, a daughter of the victim's family had to be given in a blood price marriage to the murderer to settle feelings of vengeance and there was no punishment for the perpetrator. No father had ever been taken to jail because of the forced marriage of his daughter.
- Women were deprived of inheritance rights. The provisions of Shariat Law<sup>18</sup>, the main religious pillar of Islam, were also not implemented.
- Cities of Afghanistan have a small number of women working in government offices. However, the salaries of women workers empower their men folk, who continue to hold the purse strings.
- The Maternal Mortality Ratio in Afghanistan was the second highest in the world. In the north-east this rate was the highest in the world i.e. 6,500 for 100,000 live births. In USA it was 2 per 100,000 live births. In the rest of Afghanistan it was 1,500 for 100,000 live births.
- 70% of Afghanistan's population was facing extreme poverty.
- In 2007, when quotas for reserving seats for women in government were in operation, 68 women entered the Parliament. However, in 2009 a Law was passed where rape in marriage was prohibited, but it was provided that if the wife was not prepared for sexual intercourse every four days, the husband had the right to stop feeding her, and this law was drafted and passed with not a single woman objecting to it. After an international outcry, which proclaimed that the law was discriminatory, violent and against basic human rights, it was amended in many parts but remained controversial.
- When American attention shifted to Iraq, Afghanistan was left to fend for itself, and the powerful extremist groups in the country established themselves politically, economically and militarily. Negotiations with the Taliban were on, whereby the militant outfit sought control over the ministry of Implementation of Shariat Law which, if accepted, would be disastrous for women.

<sup>16</sup>Gender-related Development Index (GDI), measures achievement in the same basic capabilities as the HDI does, but takes note of inequality in achievement between women and men. The methodology used imposes a penalty for inequality, such that the GDI falls when the achievement levels of both women and men in a country go down or when the disparity between their achievements increases. The greater the gender disparity in basic capabilities, the lower a country's GDI compared with its HDI. The GDI is simply the HDI discounted, or adjusted downwards, for gender inequality. Source: [http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi\\_gem/](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/gdi_gem/)

<sup>17</sup>UNESCO, Kabul, 2008-2009, *The UNESCO Country Programming Document, Afghanistan*

<sup>18</sup>Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet, prescribing both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for lawbreaking. It has generally been supplemented by legislation adapted to the conditions of the day, though the manner in which it should be applied in modern states is a subject of dispute between Muslim traditionalists and reformists. Source: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sharia?view=uk>

- The financial crisis has led to the curtailment of human rights and freedoms. The crisis was not simply a crisis of credit and markets but it became a crisis of food water and fuel. It is the poorest and weakest individuals in the world who suffer the greatest in the economic downturn.
- The struggle for gender equality also experienced setbacks during the global financial crisis. Most importantly it showed how vulnerable women are as an economic group, especially in countries where they are not seen as autonomous and contributing citizens. The financial crisis has further burdened the opportunity for women to participate in society.

***A crisis, financial or political, should not halt the project of human rights; rather the commitment to human rights would promote stability, collaborative spirit and the enjoyment of freedoms that well help stem the crisis and reduce suffering.***

- The author would like to appeal to the international women's movements to intervene for the empowerment of Afghan women, reformation of all laws related to women, creation of structures and policies that would strengthen the access of women to justice, jobs, employment, economic opportunities and economic resources and government services. It is the international support which can

make the difference; otherwise a dark future lies ahead for women in Afghanistan.

## **Economic Crisis, Conflict, International Aid and its Impact on Women**

**Mohammad Musa Mahmoodi**

*Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan*

Afghanistan had not been directly hit by the international economic crisis. However, since its economic growth is dependent on international aid, any decrease in aid inflows would affect its economy. Despite the injection of more than 40 billion US Dollars in the past eight years, the unimproved conditions of vulnerable groups, especially women, who have remained bereft of the benefits of the aid, remains a matter of enormous concern, and brings to light the question of effectiveness of international aid. The global economic crisis will affect the ability and willingness of many international community members to continue with unconditional commitment to support Afghanistan economy.

The poverty cycle in Afghanistan has been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict. Unemployment figures for women are 50% higher than that for men. Gender based discrimination is endemic in the country. Very little has

been done in the country to generate employment for women. The presence of conflict has been a deterrent for women accessing employment, education and health services. According to government statistics, 44% of the Afghan families are food-insecure and 35% of the families cannot provide for their daily caloric needs. Women bear the worst brunt of this economic crisis-conflict-poverty cycle.

The situation is grave and to prevent the crisis from aggravating further, to overcome economic challenges and improve the social, economic and cultural situation of Afghan women, the government of Afghanistan must amend the existing laws, or develop new regulations protecting women's social, economic and political rights; provide more security and opportunity for those women who face hardships at home or in society; implement all laws and policies designed and developed to empower women; provide justice and security for women victims of discrimination and violence; invest in social security and economic sectors that directly benefit women; improve the skills and knowledge of women workers through vocational training and skill building programmes.

## Comments

The discussion in this session of the workshop focused on the situation in Afghanistan.

- Despite the fact that Afghanistan has got international aid worth billions of dollars, the money has not been effectively used and spent. Afghanistan has gone through a lot in terms of war and conflict and, despite the fact that a lot of money comes in by way of aid, there was no commitment to build infrastructure, local capacity and put systems in place for developing the

***Aid to Afghanistan is like a business. The political will and commitment for reconstruction and establishing peace, engaging in the nation building process in Afghanistan is lacking.***

economy. There are no livelihood options. All technical jobs were in the hands of expats and there was no commitment to moving towards a

long-run transition where these jobs could go to the Afghans. In the last three decades with the ongoing war, the sense of nation had been eroded. There were no cultural artefacts, monuments or arts and crafts. What was needed

to build the nation was a sense of identity and commitment and not international aid, which, in any case, was not really going to the Afghan people.

- International aid cannot be held responsible for everything that goes wrong with Afghanistan. The lack of vision of the leaders is also responsible for the situation.
- International aid agencies work for themselves, donors work for themselves, human right bodies work for themselves, the government does not go to anyone. So it is a difficult situation.

# Crisis and Women's Natural Resource Management



*This session dealt with the issue of indigenous women, who had been facing double marginalization by virtue of being indigenous as well as women. Both direct and indirect impacts of climate change, depletion of natural resources and agrarian crises were being felt, and the issue has to be located in a continuum, within the unfolding of the processes of privatization, globalization and the global financial crisis. In this context, the continuing struggles of women and women's agencies, in addressing these problems were particularly significant.*

***When you observe natural resource management within the context of globalisation, privatization and economic-financial crisis, you can see the continuity of these forces, and the struggle of women and women's agencies to address these problems.***

***Govind Kelkar***

## **Economic Crisis and Women's Natural Resource Management with Special Reference to India's North-East**

**Patricia Mukhim**

*Indigenous Women's Resource Centre, India*

The North-East of India is still considered a distant outpost for the large majority and is only sometimes remembered by the rest of the country and its people. The region has suffered from huge infrastructure bottlenecks. Connectivity is poor even among the seven states and mobility is difficult. There are only two industries worth their name- oil and tea, both set up by the British during their tenure. The region got attention because it had huge mineral resources. The region above all, is a conflict zone. There have been several mutinies arising out of a sense of real and perceived neglect and alienation with the rest of India. Conflict has greatly reduced women's mobility.

- The only way the global financial crisis could have impacted this region was through the 'Look East' policy, but fortunately the policy never took off despite the rhetoric. It was seen as an important land and water link to the rest of Asia through Myanmar. The

'Look East' policy had strengthened the rest of India's bilateral ties with South East Asian nations but had done nothing for the North-East.

- The only positive development was the negotiation between Sheikh Hasina and the Government of Delhi on the opening up Chittagong Port for North-Eastern exports, which could be helpful given the perishable nature of their exports.
- Because the North-East was a conflict zone, it experienced a vicious cycle of growth, where presence of conflict discouraged growth and development activities, the absence of which in return further exacerbated social and economic discontent, leading to intensification of the conflict. Understandably therefore, the region was the least favoured destination for inland and foreign investors.
- After 1991, Government of India initiated a liberal industrial and investment policy offering a ten-year tax holiday to industrialists who dared to venture into the region. However, these policies exacerbated the extractive mining processes. The cement giant Lafarge got 100 hectares of land through very surreptitious methods. In the past 15 years, about 20 large cement companies have stationed themselves in Meghalaya alone.

***Commodification of our forests has killed our forests.***

***Patricia Mukhim***

- Industrial units have been set up in the state owned zone i.e. Export Promotion Industrial Park (a smaller version of a SEZ). These have become hubs for polluting, energy intensive industrial units. This has caused immense pollution and environmental devastation.
- Indigenous women in the North-East have definitely enjoyed greater mobility and visibility, and that has given them slightly larger options for livelihood. In terms of forest use, they have access to fuel wood, medicinal herbs, broomstick, honey, spices, and pepper. But the challenge today is that the forests are dwindling and more and more are being cut down to pave the way for mining activities. There have been attempts to grow *Jatropha* which is said to be grown in wastelands. In the North-East however, there are no wastelands and all land is productive land. Commodification of the forests has thus destroyed indigenous women's livelihood options.
- In the so-called tribal states, inhabited by the majority of the indigenous people, land was owned by the community, clans and individuals. Only reserve forests were with the state, which accounted for about 4% of the total forest cover. The knowledge of indigenous people in conserving these forests has not

been tapped, due to absence of consultations with real communities of indigenous women and men. The community has come to be defined by the tribal elite.

- The Indian policy makers are ignorant of the fact that women are completely excluded from the decision making process in these bodies. This is true even for a state like Meghalaya, which boasted, of a matrilineal culture. The notion of matrilineality itself needed to be demystified, since it gave a wrong impression about female empowerment.
- Land issues are particularly important in the issue of food security. The *jhoom* (shifting cultivation) fields were the last surviving organic agricultural spaces. Indigenous women should not be compelled to abandon *jhoom* in favour of settled agriculture. Indigenous women still use indigenous rice seeds and were able to conserve them because of the *jhoom* fields. After shifting to settled agriculture, they begin to use seeds given by the agriculture department i.e. high yielding varieties. Indigenous seeds are resilient to climate change and pests, but they are slowly losing out to hybrid and other seeds, because conserving seeds was difficult unless they could be used over and over again. The state did not encourage women to be conservers. Organically produced rice

that was very tasty and nutritious, was not promoted. In Thailand they were asked to taste Jasmine rice that was being sold at 25 Thai baht per kg, but the Jasmine rice was nowhere near in comparison to the taste of rice from their own hills.

- Women had made the best use of kitchen gardens, producing vegetables for personal consumption, a small amount of which was marketed. Apart from this they undertook livestock rearing, especially the free range chicken and pigs. Livestock gave women a sense of status and pride.
- Poor women were stuck to the traditional livelihoods- growing vegetables, rice, livestock farming and these women could benefit only from special poverty alleviation schemes of international funding agencies. Global recession had seen a cut in aid to India and consequently to the North-East. So it is likely to impact further the poor and the marginalized women, unless the government takes upon itself the responsibility of augmenting resources in this sector.
- Exposure to export markets had adverse consequences in terms of women shifting to growing exotic crops at high value and low volume end of the market, such as strawberry cultivation that had led to a move away from vegetables and rice cultivation. These exotic crops, however, had a very volatile

market and the government had encouraged diversification of crops without informing women about these consequences.

- Indigenous women had always dominated the markets selling perishable goods, fish, and vegetables. In Meghalaya and Nagaland there were more women involved in the food industry, selling food and tea along the highways. About 3000 trucks pass through this highway carrying coal and other goods. Because of overnight stops en route by trucks on these highways, women became vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.-
- Women are heavily engaged in sericulture farming. They rear special varieties of silkworms specific to the region, such as *Muga*, *Eri* and *Oak Tasar*. The cocoons are threaded and woven into shawls and stored for niche markets. However, more land is needed to get into this activity, which is becoming scarce and therefore Muga production has dwindled.
- Indigenous women have a strong traditional indigenous medicinal knowledge system. Commodification of land and forests is pushing women out of this traditional form of livelihood.
- Women are now engaged in floriculture and horticulture such as export of orchids. But the poor and the destitute women who cannot

afford primary investment capital are excluded from the above activities.

- Water is important for life, health and sanitation and there are serious threats to life and liberty caused by dwindling water resources. Due to mining activities, a lot of the aquifers have been blasted and rivers poisoned with sulphuric acid. There has been no attempt to reclaim or clean up the rivers or the abandoned coal mines. Indigenous women often earn their livelihood through washing clothes and they earn at least Rs. 100-200 a day depending on how many cycles they wash. But since the water sources were getting further and further away from their homes they are finding it difficult to walk long distances.
- Conflict in the region has alienated natural resources in favour of men to sustain militant activities and militants are euphemistically called 'national workers'.
- The economic crisis has resulted in cuts in the social sector spending in the region, despite the fact that reproductive rights and reproductive and maternal health indicators are abysmal. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) and the Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) are both very high. Statistics from Assam put the figures at 480 per 100,000 live births for MMR from 2004 to 2006, and 74 per 1000 live births for IMR, which is the highest

in the country. The global crisis has increased the price of medicines and health care by 4.5%. The cost of food grains has also gone up. Inflation has made it much more difficult for women to get nutritious food. Capacity building on socio-economic rights awareness generation and their implementation is urgently needed in the region.

- Women also need to reclaim lost titles to land and property from men. The NGO sector in the region has been very weak and the state was getting coercive. Political education of indigenous women on a sustained basis is very important if they have to take up advocacy roles. Reallocation of resources and Land Ceiling Act are very important as land resources were slipping into private hands.
- Mainstreaming gender and resource management and customary practices, wherever the indigenous peoples' culture no longer supports equitable rights and equal access to resources is required. As far as loss of seeds as resource was concerned, the state needs to promote indigenous seeds by supporting women farmers and their products.

## Comments

Issues discussed included the differences between the indigenous populations; modernization and sustainable development in the context of natural resource management; the effect of land acquisition on women; women in the livestock industry in Pakistan; the case of indigenous populations in Sri Lanka losing out their forests to the Government; the matrilineal structure of Meghalaya, and what it does and does not imply; and the situation of women in Nepal.

- While in the North-East, literacy rates and awareness was high, it was not so in Orissa, highlighting the fact that differences existed even among indigenous people with regard to natural resource management.
- Regarding natural resource management, modernization is creating a large number of problems in our country. Sustainable development means forging linkages between natural capital and economic growth and hence the state has to think in terms of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) based activities or other such activities. Women have been trying to do it in the context of the tribal population in Gujarat but the government was not listening to them. The problem lies with the growth model. We have to think in

terms of a sustainable growth model.

- Women constituted a large chunk of landless farmers as well as share croppers, and their land was being taken away by the government on the pretext that it was wasteland. Earlier there were extension services that were a link between the farming and the scientific community. Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) for instance, had turned into a total GMO bandwagon, and there was no information available on how they were planning to handle the possible adverse consequences of climate change or hunger in the country.
- The livestock industry was entirely looked after by women in Pakistan, yet when women tried to set up cooperatives, the earnings went to men and women ended up with nothing.
- In Pakistan, the Agricultural Development Bank which claims to exist for farmers, does not help small farmers or peasants and literally none of the small people. That has to come in, call it micro finance or whatever but it has to go to the female peasants. Women look after the entire dairy livestock that produces milk in Pakistan. Pakistan is the sixth largest country in the world producing milk but the women don't get even a penny. The government

## Indigenous Women, Natural Resource Management and Climate Change Nepal: A Case Study

Lucky Sherpa

Member, Constituent Assembly, Nepal

***The whole terminology is a male dominated terminology. The patriarchal mindset is one of the biggest problems in addressing the impact of the crisis on women. Lucky Sherpa***

Indigenous women everywhere are tremendously discriminated against because of social, cultural and racial discrimination that they face in addition to gender discrimination. They face gender discrimination within their own strata, home and family. The regional disparities that they face, because of belonging to the mountainous rural areas, are a major concern, as are questions of their roots and distinct identity. The biggest problem in case of indigenous women is the non-recognition of their identity. Some of these concerns have already been taken up by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues<sup>19</sup> but have not yet reflected in specific government policies.

Indigenous women's contribution to indigenous knowledge and its potential to deal with many issues like the food crisis and climate change has not been recognized and there is a lack of research and data on these issues. Neither the government of Nepal, nor International Aid Agencies have made any investment in protecting indigenous knowledge systems. Aid has become donor-driven rather than being people-driven and it is increasingly being given for issues like HIV/AIDS which has never been their concern. The financial aid to Nepal has not reached the most vulnerable groups. On issues such as climate change, environment and pollution, Nepal prefers to engage with international experts, who promote transfer of technology, rather than look at its own indigenous knowledge system to deal with the crisis.

The crisis in Nepal has hit the tourism industry hard, led to a fall in remittances and return migration from other crisis ridden countries like Malaysia. Given the importance of these sectors for indigenous women, all this has impacted their livelihoods, the dropout rate of their children has increased, and women are getting internally displaced in search of jobs. They have been caught in the trafficking web and the search for job opportunities has exposed them to violence.

Indigenous women's issues have not yet been recognized as human rights issues and there is an urgent need to stop characterizing these issues as ethnic or individual issues and look at them as human rights issues. The exclusion of indigenous people from the socio-political and economic realm is a major concern.

***The economic crisis cannot be judged only from the perspective of one sector of the society. Happiness cannot be judged only in terms of economic benefits. The happiness of any country cannot be judged by the number of rich people in the country. It should be judged by the quantum of human rights and social harmony. Lucky Sherpa***

<sup>19</sup>The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council, with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. Source: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>

## **Adivasi<sup>20</sup> Women and Grassroots Workers in Indigenous Resource Management Experiences of Bidyutlata, a Tribal Woman from Orissa**

***It is very important today to preserve natural resources and it is more important to hear what indigenous people have to say. It is important that we make indigenous women a part of the policy making process. Bidyutlata***

Forests were very important for the indigenous people, because of dependence of such people on forests for their livelihood activities i.e. to collect food and fuel, and the herbs and leaves that are very important for this section. Forty to fifty years back, when cultivation was based on traditional methods, crops were grown in plenty and people were happy. A lot has changed since then, and in particular the rampant and often inappropriate use of fertilizers has affected soil fertility and has led to increased food insecurity and starvation with people having only one meal a day. Women have suffered most due to food insecurity with pregnant women suffering more because of low calorie food, which adversely affects the health of both the mother and the baby. There is an absence of education and awareness on matters such as health and family planning, and the use of fertilizers.

Work given by the government through National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is only seasonal and though payment is promised within 15-20 days, often actual payment is made 4-5 months after completion of work. This increases food insecurity and as well the tendency of migration to places like Mumbai, Kerala, etc. Migration often brings with it HIV/AIDS infection to the villages and there is a severe lack of awareness and information about the disease, about what should and should not be done. And women are affected directly by this.

Forests have been badly exploited through unsustainable practices. Women should be organized into Self Help Groups (SHGs) for collection of non-timber forest resources like leaves, honey and other resources and marketing them through proper channels to earn higher incomes and overcome food insecurity. Corporations like POSCO and other industrial interventions in the rural areas, by demanding more natural resources, specifically water, were adversely affecting local interests. What is needed is investment in local resources to address migration and find solutions to problems. Industrial interventions by POSCO and Vedanta had brought much suffering for them because forests in particular provided resources they depended upon. It is very important today to preserve natural resources and make women a part of the policy making process.

---

<sup>20</sup>Adivasi is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups believed to be the aboriginal population of India

## Case Study from Orissa

### Basanti

The water level in Orissa has continuously been receding, causing hardships for women who have to walk long distances to fetch water. At present women use spring water in their villages because they do not have any tube wells and hence it is important to conserve this precious resource. However water quality was being increasingly affected by increased mining activities in the region. Earlier they were able to utilize forest produce like leaves, barks, roots, herbs for consumption purposes but the forest officials were in the process of planting trees, which could readily be sold and were geared towards profit oriented production. This led to decimation of natural forests. Fertility of the soil also declined considerably and the quality of seeds declined perhaps due to the excessive use of fertilizers. Tribals had earlier practiced shifting cultivation, but this practice has reduced considerably and even stopped in certain areas due to the planting of forest trees by the forest officials. Due to low productivity there has been an increase in starvation. The condition of forest dwellers in the state is bad.

Initially, when activists from the NGO Seva Bharati came to the region, there was a lot of fear and distrust amongst the villagers about their intentions and activities. But slowly they overcame this fear and worked with the organization and are now actively involved with two networks, Adivasi Adhikar Abhiyan and Chellaitamu Mahasangha. This has brought awareness and information and many of the villagers are now sending their children to schools. They have formed SHGs, and in order to combat food insecurity they are accumulating foodstuff including rice, mustard oil and other essentials and selling it within their communities. In this way, they are trying to overcome food insecurity and are very happy to be associated with Seva Bharati, which is helping bring stability into their lives. A network of male and female workers was formed in the village and it discussed what kind of work should be taken up in the village. The organizations Adivasi Adhikar Abhiyan and Chellaitamu Mahasangha were helping male members get land titles in their name. Seva Bharati is further advocating land titles for women. They are also advocating widow pension and spreading awareness of facilities like old age pension, widow pension, housing etc. that could be availed of under the Indira Awas Yojana and other such schemes.

can easily give money for the women built cooperatives. But this is not done.

- The loss of seeds is terrible. We tried to do a pilot project on urban food production. The NGOs wanted this introduced for women because they said that this would help prevent anaemia. People lent us their land for the project. We could not get seeds. There was no organic, natural seed available in the market. When I got in touch with the NGOs that do organic farming, they gave me a tiny packet of seeds. I was quite amazed with the small quantity of seeds given to me, but there was not much left. We could not do this simply because we could not get the seed.
- Opening up of Chittagong Port for the Indian states in the North-East, was a sensitive political issue for Bangladesh, as it was going to affect their economic activity.
- The status of a very small indigenous population in Sri Lanka, which had until recently been classified as 'others' in the census and other official statistics- their forests were taken away. As part of one of their big dam projects, the government took over the vast acreage of forests and the tribal community was given only 300 acres to use, which was absolutely inadequate. Tribals were given the option to enter 'civilization' by becoming farmers with some land

allocation. About 1000-2000 families opted to do this but were now in debt bondage and had become rural peasants. They also changed their names with the younger generation adopting Sinhala names, thereby slowly obliterating their identity and their heritage.

- Women are now realizing the importance of participation in local political institutions and having a say in matters of governance, especially at the lowest level. It is a misnomer to think that women necessarily inherit property under matrilineal structures. The younger daughter does not inherit the property, but is only the custodian of the ancestral property, to which everyone in the family has an equal right, as in case of Meghalaya. Very high attrition rates in marriages and cohabitation were being experienced

here, and the responsibility of bringing up children was entirely that of the women. The man could just abandon them and move on. There are increasing numbers of female-headed households in Meghalaya, with the youngest daughter as the custodian of the ancestral property.

- Where extension services were concerned, the ICAR has not helped them with their basic needs. For example, they had been producing citrus oranges and beetle leaves, which have been diseased for several years now without any help forthcoming.
- Indigenous women in Nepal were increasingly becoming dependant on foreign markets and migrating in search of jobs. There is no policy to protect these groups of migrants, and women migrants had been rendered very vulnerable to

exploitation and violence. The global economic crisis has also led to an increase in violence against women.

- Nepal was going to have a new federal structure, with the State Structuring Committee designing its own structure on the basis of identity, ethnicity, language, region and also historical continuity. Women were trying to have a new constitution, especially to deal with the issue of discrimination against women, marginalization of Dalits and indigenous people but the problems were with its implementation and it would take time to transform them into national laws. There are 19 indigenous Members of Parliament (MPs) and 197 women in all in the Parliament now (2009-10), but this representation should be translated into making some real impact on transforming women's lives.

# Policy Response to the Crisis The Indian Experience



*This session of the workshop was conducted on the basis of the presentation made by Santosh Mehrotra, on the response of the Indian Government to the current global economic and financial crisis. The measures taken were outlined, and in the discussion that followed, several aspects of failures of current policy initiatives in mitigating the impact of the crisis on the most marginalised and vulnerable groups were discussed and debated upon.*

## **The Global Economic Crisis, its Impact and Policy Response of the Indian State**

**Santosh Mehrotra**

*Institute of Applied Manpower Research,  
Planning Commission, Government of India*

Unlike other crises in the recent past, India by virtue of being more integrated with global markets post liberalization, has been impacted by the current crisis. However, the impact has not been significant as compared to other South East Asian economies or China. The Indian economy was not impacted greatly by the 2008 crisis since it was then essentially a domestically driven economy. Savings to GDP and

investment to GDP ratio had risen enormously with domestic savings driving the growth; investment was 39% of the GDP out of which only 1% investment was through foreign savings in the form of FDI.

However, certain amount of coupling (integration with the world market) had taken place. Up until the 1990s, the export to GDP ratio was only about 11% and had been stagnant at that rate for a long period of time, but by 2007 the ratio was already 18%. There were three principal channels of transmission of the global crisis to the Indian economy. First was through finance, the second was through decline in exports and the third was fluctuations in foreign exchange rates. The impact inevitably was going to be restricted to certain groups of people and certain classes because of the nature of the coupling with the global economy.

After the crisis broke, liquidity of the banking sector (even though most of the banks were public sector banks) fell sharply. Fall of bank liquidity impacted corporations, medium sized enterprises, and to some extent small sized enterprises. But 60% of the Indian population did not have bank accounts even after 60 years of independence.

The NREGA has caused a revolution in this regard, because the wages under NREGA are increasingly being paid through bank accounts. This has resulted in an increase in the number of bank accounts and post office accounts to 84 million. This means that approximately 400 million people were brought into the financial net. However, the fall in bank liquidity impacted only a very small proportion of the people.

Capital markets were impacted. Foreign institutional investor flows had driven the Sensex and Dalal Street (the Mumbai Stock Market). Capital markets had risen consistently. In early 2006, the stock market index stood at about 10,000. In the beginning of 2008, the markets rose to 19,500 to 20,000 and the moment Lehman Brothers collapsed it plummeted sharply to 8,000 a year later. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are a major trigger in the market. In 2007-08, the FIIs brought in 20 billion dollars into Dalal Street. In 2008-09 FIIs withdrew fourteen billion dollars from the stock markets, which had massive implications for the capital market.

Another mechanism of crisis transmission was through financial remittances. Remittance inflow in 2006-07 was 28 billion, in 2007-08 it was 41 billion, in 2008-09 it was 43 billion and in 2009-10 it was 54 billion dollars of inflow, which could be due to return

migration with the disappearance of construction contracts in the Middle East. And this one-way flow would slowly peter out. However the share of the Middle East in total remittances has declined and the share of America has increased recently. The impact of return migration was a gendered impact, especially since many nurses from Kerala had gone abroad and were returning.

The second major channel of crisis transmission was the decline in exports. Though the export to GDP ratio had risen recently, it was not comparable to other South Asian economies or China, and export growth in India until the run up to the crisis was 27 to 45% per annum. So when the crisis broke out, it was likely to impact output and employment. The Labour Bureau of the Ministry of Labour, in two surveys<sup>21</sup> (the first was in October-December, 2008 and the second in April-June, 2009) studied this impact. They looked at the key sectors of manufacturing and services. In manufacturing they looked at mining, textiles, metals, gems, jewellery and auto parts. In services they looked at transport and Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). These sectors together contribute 60% of the GDP. They concluded that half a million jobs were lost by October-December 2008. The most affected sectors were gems and jewellery,

transport and auto parts. It was mostly men who were working in these sectors. The major impact was felt by export-oriented industries.

In non-export oriented units in the same sector for any given industry, employment increased. So presumably there was some transfer taking place of employment from export-oriented units that were most impacted to non-export oriented sectors. The other conclusion was that metals and auto sectors were offering more contractual jobs and fewer long-term positions.

The crisis impacted the Indian foreign exchange reserves and foreign exchange rates. FDI did not fall but there was a massive outflow of FIIs as a result of the crisis. It had begun coming back recently as indicated by the rise in Sensex. The foreign exchange inflows up to early parts of 2008 had led to appreciation of the rupee from Rs. 45 to 46 to 50 per US Dollar until 2000, as the outflows began there was an exchange rate depreciation that took place with the exchange rate going up to almost Rs. 50 in 2009. As inflow of dollars has resumed at least 8-10 months back, there have been positive inflows into the economy, even on the FII front, so the exchange rate has gone up. This should have had a positive impact on the exports, but it did not, since the global markets collapsed.

<sup>21</sup>For details see the ministry's website <http://labour.nic.in/>.

## Policy Measures Adopted and their Impact

- The government had put in place three fiscal measures. It increased expenditure and cut taxes. The fiscal stimuli happened within weeks of September 2008. First in November 2008, then in February 2009. After the new government came to power in April, a full budget was presented in June 2009. The stimuli together accounted for 1.8% of the GDP, which though smaller than the Chinese stimuli, was nevertheless needed.
- At the same time, special assistance was put in place for exports. Part of the stimuli was increased expenditure on rural development. In order to distinguish between rural developments of different kinds, certain specifically targeted schemes were favoured in terms of allocation of this expenditure. Accordingly, the state had put in place a significant increase in the allocation for NREGA. The gendered impact of this step was going to be positive due to the fact that 50% of all the NREGA workers were women.
- The other impact of this massive increase in expenditure was that on the macro-economic side, the fiscal

balance was going down. Hence the fiscal deficit, that had been contained significantly over the preceding 3-4 years to over 6% of the state and central Budgets combined in the federal had gone up to around 10%.

- Part of the increase in fiscal deficit had an inflationary impact. So despite the fact that the global oil prices were now declining, the upward pressure on inflation partly came because of the massive increase in exports and expenditure.
- This was not the main reason for food price increase. Food prices were rising well before the crisis. There is no question that there was massive failure on part of the government in containing transmission of the rise in foreign prices to domestic prices. Food inflation rose from 6-7% to 16-17%. The poor design and implementation of the PDS was chiefly responsible for this.
- There was a massive rise in rural development expenditure but other social expenditures including those on health and education had been squeezed in the interest of fiscal management.
- Because of the fact that India primarily remained a services

economy with an average agricultural growth of 4.4% which had sustained rural consumption expenditures and because infrastructural investment had increased, the impact of the crisis on the country was less than what could have been.

- Gendered impacts of the crisis could well have occurred at the micro level while exports of textiles, garments and carpets were affected and the construction industry had also witnessed a decline. The policy issues that needed to be addressed were the lack of studies at the micro level based on gender disaggregated data.
- Other policy issues to be addressed were a comprehensive Rehabilitation Bill, and passing and implementation of a Land Acquisition Bill. In this regard, the NC Saxena Committee report on Vedanta<sup>22</sup> and its activities on illegal mining in Orissa etc. should come to the fore. The Forest Rights Act has been put in place but it has to be properly implemented. Finally, Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) also has to be implemented.
- An expert group had submitted a report to the Planning Commission in 2008 titled *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*<sup>23</sup>. The

<sup>22</sup>Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India, New Delhi, August 16, 2010, *Report of the Four Member Committee for Investigation into the Proposal submitted by the Orissa Mining Company for Bauxite Mining in Niyamgiri*. [moef.nic.in/downloads/public-information/Saxena\\_Vedanta.pdf](http://moef.nic.in/downloads/public-information/Saxena_Vedanta.pdf)

<sup>23</sup>Report of an Expert Group to the Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, 2008, *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*, For details see [planningcommission.gov.in/reports/publications/rep\\_dce.pdf](http://planningcommission.gov.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf)

arguments that were made and continue to be made were that all the concerns that have been raised by our Adivasi friends are ultimately issues of governance. Governance cannot be improved by taking a security centric to the Maoist issue. The approach needs to begin with talks with the Adivasi communities and the Naxalites<sup>24</sup> and the talks should be able to lay the groundwork for more development action. Security has to play a secondary role in this process.

- India had instituted the Skill Development Mission for the years 2008-2010. According to National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data, 93% of unskilled workers were in the unorganized sector and only 10% of the work force had any formal skills. So the Skill Development Mission was very critical. While it has been created at the central level, state governments have been much slower in replicating that structure.
- Many measures which have not yet been forthcoming could be done at the state level like putting in funds for promotion of handicrafts, supporting sericulture, herbal medicine, nursing skills etc. More nursing schools need to be opened

so that young women do not have to necessarily migrate to Delhi or Mumbai and get exploited.

- A major survey was going to be launched by the Planning Commission on clusters. There were 6,600 clusters in the country, both modern and artisanal. However, only 1000 of these were modern. The remaining 5,600 were artisanal. It pointed out the difficulties of holding sustained consultations with the fragmented artisanal sector, which was scattered all over the country. The modern clusters had industry association and it was easier to talk to them. India still had a difficult situation given the existence of a large number of *beedi* (tobacco rolled in tendu leaf) and *zari* (a tinsel thread used for weaving and embroidery) workers, for example, in areas where women are working in large numbers but consultation was difficult due to lack of representative bodies.

### **Limitations and Unfinished Agendas: Mapping the State Policy Response for the Future**

There was no risk of the government pushing back the social progress agenda. In fact, the agenda now

consisted of five things. They have already got the right to work in rural areas through NREGA and there have been serious discussions on devising an urban component. They have won the right to education. There are three more rights to be won and these have to remain part of the agenda. The right to food is on top of the agenda. It is going to be a reality in six months. It might be watered down but it will be a reality. Right to Health Bill is already on the website of the Ministry of Health. The National Rural Health Mission is in place and it is doing interesting and useful things. There are problems but the central government's programme is not a problem. There is the right to social assistance and social insurance. So, these five social progress programmes are on the agenda and it is unlikely that these are going to be pushed back.

The R&R Bill and the Land Acquisition Bill have to go through. It may go through in a watered down planned manner, there may be struggles around it, but the fact remains that these have to go through. Maoism existed in India in a geographic arc, which ran from Nepal in the North to Orissa and Andhra Pradesh in the south. This is a forested area, very rich in mines and

<sup>24</sup>The term 'Naxal' derives from the name of the village Naxalbari in West Bengal in India where the movement had its origin. The Naxals are considered radical communists, supportive of Maoist political sentiment and ideology. Their origin can be traced to the split in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leading to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist). Initially the movement had its centre in West Bengal. In later years, it spread into less developed areas of rural central and eastern India, such as Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh through the activities of underground groups like the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

minerals. Some mining activities were going on through bribery, and hence an enclave type growth was taking place in some of the least developed parts of the country including Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh. These are all growing at 9 to 10%, driving on the back of all these activities. This was going to continue *ad nauseam*, *ad infinitum*, for the reason that the Adivasis shall not and will not give up until the R&R issues are taken care of. Under discussion is the issue of 26% equity to be handed over.

To address the non-participation of Muslim women, the rural development ministry had a programme that was run badly so far, but is about to be completely transformed. Thanks to the phenomenal success of Velugu<sup>25</sup>, a Self-Help Group (SHG) programme for self employed women in Andhra Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh villages, Muslim women were not participating in NREGA works but they were doing fantastic things in Velugu tribe activity in Saharanpur. For HIV/AIDS patients there is a provision in NREGA for providing water at sites where work was being done. There is a

provision for HIV/AIDS positive women to run crèches. Regarding the issue of small producers not getting enhanced credit after the fiscal crisis, they were outside the credit market before and are outside the credit market now. Similarly workers in the informal sector did not have social protection earlier and post crisis also there was no protection. There was no help to small producers before the crisis, similarly no help after the crisis.

The women's rights movement was actually getting stronger by the day or else we would not have been in a situation where right to food was about to turn into a reality. There was slow progress but not enough progress. They should all get together to join hands in order to ensure universalisation of elementary education. Regretfully, the teacher's accountability clause has been dropped, and unless teachers are held accountable, universalisation of elementary education cannot be ensured. What needs to be done, where the right to education is concerned, is to ensure accountability of teachers to the community by giving it powers over

releasing their salary and granting them leave. India has one of the highest rates of teacher absenteeism in the world i.e. 25% according to an NSSO survey; in Jharkhand it was 37%, in Tamil Nadu (the state performing the best in terms of this indicator) it was 17%. The Planning Commission is not as effective as we would like it to be. In the budget there was an increase for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan but not of the magnitude that one would have expected from a central government that enacted the Right to Education Act. They won a victory in April 2009 by an umbrella act coming into force but were all dissatisfied by it.

However, greater changes could happen once the fiscal deficit to GDP ratio was not over 10%, as they had to learn to live with the fact that since the economy was integrated with the global market, Moody's and S&P (Standard And Poor)<sup>26</sup> would downgrade our credit rating if they did not bring down their fiscal deficit now. These facts are not going to change overnight. The fact also remains that it is growth which will generate

<sup>25</sup>The Andhra Pradesh Government has initiated the 'Rural Poverty Elimination Program' under the project 'Velugu' (literally 'light'). The project formally commenced on 16th June, 2000 and the programme was implemented through three mechanisms: first, grassroots mobilization and formation of self-help groups which would empower the poor and tackle demand-side constraints; second, provision of resources (e.g., through community investment fund) to expand the base of local public goods and community infrastructure (e.g., drinking water, local roads, community facilities); and third, institutional strengthening measures. This included: strengthening capacity of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs); reforms to support greater private sector involvement in rural areas, and greater convergence of existing social sector and anti-poverty programs.

<sup>26</sup>Standard & Poor's (S&P) and Moody's are two of the three (third being Fitch) biggest credit rating agencies in the United States, as well as globally. They publish financial research and analysis on stocks and bonds. They issue credit ratings for the debt of public and private corporations, as well as country wise ratings of economic performance and risks of sovereign defaults. These are, however, often criticized for compromising sovereign decision making powers in favour of the interests of finance capital due to their influence in determining speculative investment flows.

the revenue that will allow expenditure increase, which will create the fiscal space to enhance social security for the unorganized sector.

Two years back, the government had put in place RSBY, being run by the Ministry of Labour. It was on the issue of health insurance that guaranteed cashless hospitalization for all those below

***While implementing NREGA schemes for women in particular, multiple levels of exclusion faced by women should be considered, such as exclusions faced by poor and illiterate Muslim women who unable to access many services on grounds of tradition and custom, discriminations faced by HIV/AIDS positive women etc.***

**Santosh Mehrotra**

poverty line, and it was rapidly being universalized. Regarding displacement and rehabilitation, WB did a study for 20 R&R projects, ten from China and ten from India during 1986-94. While in eight out of 10 cases in China, the R&R was handled brilliantly, in India it was handled well only in two cases out of ten. In other words, the state in India had neglected the rehabilitation of displaced people as a result of the investment policy it had followed in the past sixty years, and was paying the price for it. The Adivasis and those displaced had revolted against the state, as they should have and this had led to the rise of Maoism. One has to rehabilitate

alongside with investment and that is the only way to go about it.

## Comments

Issues discussed included the problem of multiple exclusions faced by women in NREGA schemes; impact of trade and financial integration on the poor; impact on women's employment; need to link NREGA with the affected populations; absence in the agenda of social protection of workers; limitations of the Planning Commission; squeeze on education and health sectors; diluted nature of the social security bill in India; and financial liberalisation plans of the Government of India.

- Both Indian trade and financial integration had risen, with trade integration of exports rising from 5.7% to 14%, and where financial integration was concerned, the ratio of capital inflow and outflow to GDP went up to 64%. This integration had increased the trade and financial links with EU and America and the impact of the crisis in that respect would be high. Although the impact was felt within certain pockets, the pockets were widespread and the impact was more on informal workers and small producers. While the former had no social protection whatsoever,

the latter were facing an acute credit crunch in such a crisis. A UNDP study<sup>27</sup> of six sectors highlighted that the indirect impact on the poorer sections of the economy was higher and more serious than generally recognized. Women's employment in itself does not determine the impact. Gems and jewellery sectors do not include women. But large sectors having women were impacted because non-working women had to come to the labour market as part time workers. The UNDP study showed that one-third of the families had to send a non working woman into the labour market to low productivity jobs and in addition to that the number of working women had also increased. So 40% of the households send their women to do paid work in the labour market when they are affected by the crisis. Secondly, women's unpaid work had also increased considerably as women turned out to be major shock absorbers for these families with paid work outside being substituted for unpaid work within the household at least in one-third of the households studied.

- Rising expenditures and bail outs had not reached small producers and informal workers and the rise in NREGA and rural programmes had not been linked to affected people in

<sup>27</sup>UNDP India Publication, November, 2009, Global Economic Crisis: Impact on the Poor in India – A Synthesis of Sector Studies

a systematic manner and there was an absence of labour reforms. This had been borne out, for instance, by the above mentioned study on the gems and jewellery sector. So, increase in rural expenditure need not necessarily affect these workers positively. The government approach in terms of bailouts was to reach their goal of double digit GDP growth, doubling exports and macro management of the economy. Apart from that, there was nothing on the agenda for social protection of these workers, for small and marginal farmers and women's employment particularly for women as producers, women as wage earners and women as unpaid home-makers. For instance in the case of the diamond industry, the group conducting the study had gone to Surat to find out what happened and found that nothing had changed for workers. There was no data or information on workers and small producers and nothing had been done to improve their situation.

- In a diverse country like India, the Planning Commission represented a monolith, which was unreal. How could the centre design a single model without ensuring that they had studied the regions, knew the regions adequately, and without conceding

to the possibility of midstream corrections and evaluations? In some regions social audit was still very weak. The poverty indicators were different from the rest of India and assets were not being created under NREGA. People were digging ponds in the fields of private individuals just because they needed to pay remuneration to the women and the workers. Besides, NREGA was target-oriented. When IFAD came to design a poverty alleviation scheme for certain regions in the North-East, they took many years to study and find out what exactly the model was going to be like, and made midstream corrections because they found that it was not working.

- NREGA is a programme for which money was set aside by the government, in response to a people's movement in the country. Because the Government had not been able to organize itself on the questions of expenditures on health and education, the allocations for expenditures on the latter had been squeezed. This was a reflection of the weak status of the women's movement in this country.
- Did the squeeze on education and health expenditures occur because India had no money, or did it

happen simply because we have no understanding of why these sectors have to be squeezed at the cost of others? In terms of the Relief and Rehabilitation (R&R) Bill,<sup>28</sup> the speaker had mentioned there was a policy but no law and what was the policy based upon and how did one guarantee access to justice if there was no law to enforce it? It had been stated that the Central government had some schemes and some support systems that were not taken up later by the states, or not fully implemented. What was perceived to be the role of the central government in supporting and helping such states? Was the government planning to initiate any human rights stimuli for the future?

- What was the point in passing the highly diluted Social Security Bill 2008 that did not provide actual relief to the unorganized workers but would enable the government to still take credit for providing protection?
- What were the government's plans for financial liberalization, given the fact that it was because of its absence that the country had been insulated from the current financial crisis? According to the Reserve

<sup>28</sup>The R & R Bill, 2007, is a fresh policy initiative as yet in the draft stage following a cabinet announcement by the Indian state towards establishing a just and humane rehabilitation policy for those involuntarily displaced by development projects, including Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

Bank of India (RBI) data of 2009, Indian banks' credit creation abroad was over 15%, and the economy was already in the process of opening up its financial sectors. Regarding investment and FDI policy, the Bills talked about first displaced everyone and then rehabilitated. Was

that the approach, or were there any comprehensive approaches for investment being planned? The proposed FTAs had very strong provisions for protection of investors like the Stand Still Clause where they could not change current regulatory framework, if it was

seen to reduce the profit of the investors and these provisions were irreversible. Before India got into those kinds of agreements what kind of investment policy and regulations should have been put in place by the government?

## The Way Forward



The last two sessions of the South Asia Regional Workshop on the Global Financial and Economic Crisis included extensive discussions on consolidation of the rich discourse that had taken place over the duration of the workshop, the challenges which had been identified, and the recommendations that had been made on a range of issues including food insecurity, migration, regional conflict, natural resource management and sustainable development within a framework of social, economic and political rights of women. While grappling with forward looking strategies, the experts at the workshop also expressed concern on the declining role of the state, increase in corruption, and nepotism. There is a need to strengthen models of good governance based on democracy, which ensures women's political participation and power. States need to increase spending on social services and decrease their military expenditure. In the region, terrorism and conflict had resulted in discourses being dominated by issues of safety and security. This has undermined issues of religious and ethnic minorities. It is therefore important to prioritise a secular approach and encourage interpretation of religion from women's perspective.

The policy agenda that was developed, recommends laying down comprehensive strategies to be followed for implementing a holistic approach to issues of growth and development within a rights-based framework. It outlines the broad vision and proposes policy guidelines to be followed while formulating a response to the economic crisis as well as developing strategies for long-term growth and development; dealing with conflict situations; protecting and promoting women's rights; preserving diversity and promoting minorities and dealing with the role of Non- Governmental Organisations and International Organizations.

### Response to the Crisis

States need to envisage the crisis as an opportunity to push forward radically different policies from a rights perspective, by bringing forth the issues of sustainable and equitable growth, and the protection of all human rights of all sections of society. Right to land including land reform policies, right to equitable access to productive resources, right to decent work, right to social security, right to health and education should be part of the policy framework.

Governments should take positive steps to protect and promote livelihoods, employment and encourage participation of women in economic activities. Women need to be recognised as universal right holders and not victims belonging to a special category. The feminist movement has articulated two indicators of equality in terms of transformation of power between men and women to include equal access and engaged participation of women in decision making over resources. Access is not the same as control. Along with access, ownership, control and management of productive resources are important. Feminists have also criticised the Self Help Group (SHG) movement for its focus on self employment without ensuring women's rights to productive resources including land, water, forests, markets, capital, and credit. Women should get bigger loans<sup>29</sup> at low interest rates, and government should encourage women's cooperatives. A comprehensive gender-based stimulus package addressing all the above concerns should be developed. State policies and initiatives should address women's vulnerability and exclusion. There is also a need to develop human rights indicators from a feminist perspective. Women's task force for monitoring and implementation of these policies needs to be developed. For effective monitoring, gender disaggregated data and adoption of

gender budgeting techniques are important. Indicators should also ensure that specific issues of women from minority groups are included.

## **A Comprehensive Development Model**

States should redefine sustainable development beyond economic growth model. It should incorporate environment, human rights and promote a just society. Development should ensure human rights by building and enlarging the domestic social sector based on health, education and social security for all. While integrating domestic economies with the global economy, the emphasis should be on protection and promotion of domestic markets and on the growth of domestic employment opportunities and livelihoods. A development-based model of trade that generates secured employment, both skilled and unskilled, should be promoted. This should also include equitable access, control, management and ownership of productive resources that include financial, natural and intellectual. Development should promote conservation practices and natural resource management by indigenous

communities, women farmers, dairy workers and fishing folks. Governments should foster political rights and promote decision-making capacities of indigenous women.

States should not merely respect but should actively protect the rights of citizens from infringement by third parties such as corporations and multinational institutions. There is a need to have a dialogue with SAARC countries on issues of common concern from a rights-based approach in the context of bilateral agreements on agricultural policy and natural resources management.

## **Food Sovereignty**

Development should promote food security and hence include a universal public food distribution system to

***Women look after the entire dairy livestock that produces milk in Pakistan. They look at other animals also but especially the daily livestock is looked after by women. But they don't get the money. They give huge funding to local companies. Easy money comes in from Agriculture Development Bank, and apart from that, there is Nestle and other companies who take away all the stuff. Pakistan is the sixth largest country in the world producing milk but women don't get even a penny.***

***Najma Sadeque***

ensure no one goes hungry. Prior to financial crisis there was the food

<sup>29</sup>Poor women in India can get loans up to INR 25,000, through the microcredit programme.

crisis created by reducing the kind of food that is to be produced emphasising cash crop bio-fuel production. These practices have brought extreme crisis in the agricultural sector. Sustainable development models should guarantee food sovereignty that ensures farmers' right to produce whatever they want to produce and women's rights to conserve seeds.

70% of the women are engaged in agriculture. Women's role in agriculture is a source of livelihood and status. In planning economies, a sectoral balance view from the social perspective is important. Agriculture might be contributing comparatively less to the economy but is important for food security and women's economic activities. The act of forcing people to move out of agriculture, as there is no growth or opportunity in this sector, is causing food insecurities. While promoting 'modern' sectors, traditional sectors such as handicrafts also need to be protected.

### In Conflict Situations

Several countries and regions within countries in South Asia are facing conflicts. There is a need to conduct detailed studies from a quantitative and qualitative analysis to monitor the impact, in particular the gendered impact of such conflict situations. Post-conflict policies should be based on

***We don't want the military build up which eats into our social welfare expenditure.***

***Nimalka Fernando***

these systematic studies. The culture of impunity should be addressed and violators including drug trafficking, domestic and sexual violence perpetrators should be punished with the support and active intervention of international communities. Transitional justice and disarmament should actively be promoted.

### International Aid and Funding

The international community has a major role to play in post crisis strategies. The workshop particularly recommended governments giving generous international aid to countries in the region and donors funding social and economic justice work to make sure their funds ensure implementation and protection of human rights and promote democracy. Peoples' movements, especially women's movements and women's leadership, grassroots based NGOs, and human rights defenders should actively be promoted. Governments should review conditions attached to aid packages coming from ADB (Asian Development Bank), WB, and IMF. Independent policies based on protecting human rights irrespective of the diktats of international institutions such as the WB and the IMF should be developed.

### Promotion of Women's Rights

Women's empowerment and principles of equality and non-discrimination need to be promoted.

#### *In religion*

All religions are made by men. Secularism should be encouraged in our societies, and there should be an attempt to interpret religions from the perspective of women and promote those aspects of religions that benefit women.

#### *In marriage*

Introduce progressive concept of marriage and interpersonal relationships that address questions of violence,

***30 – 40 kms outside Delhi, Khap Panchayats are killing women and men on the pretext of honour killing for marrying within the village. Sometimes these marriages have been approved and for 3-4 years they thought that it was not right so they should be separated and if they don't listen then they should be killed.***

***Govind Kelkar***

victimization and women's vulnerabilities from an emancipatory perspective. These concepts should provide a framework for formulating, implementing and assessing personal and civil laws.

#### *In tradition*

States should stop all discriminatory practices based on religion or traditional or legal grounds. Laws need to be formulated to stop all forms of

discrimination and violence that women face in the name of tradition.

## Others

The workshop called upon the UN agencies (ILO, WB, IMF, UN Women, and UNDP etc) to support strategies based on human rights framework. International human rights obligations should be implemented and UN agencies can play a role in ensuring this.

Women at the workshop expressed interest in setting up a South Asia regional task force to monitor these issues and work collectively to develop human rights indicators from a feminist perspective. Participants expressed keenness in keeping alive this group from the region in order to work collectively on issues.

## Conclusion

The current global financial and economic crisis has affected every region of the world. Though the specific experiences of the countries and regions have been different, certain features of the crisis have been universal - decline in growth, drying up of capital flows, contraction in trade, decline in remittances and increase in poverty, hunger and unemployment. The available literature on the subject concedes to the fact that the crisis has impacted men and women differently. However, the severe implications of the crisis on women have not been sufficiently

understood. The gendered impact of the crisis in South Asia, the human costs of the crisis and in particular its effect on already marginalized populations were discussed at the workshop.

- Women have been particularly adversely affected by the current crisis, which itself combines multiple crises- a global economic recession; the devastating effects of climate change; and an ongoing food and energy crisis. All of this has compounded increasing poverty and inequality in different parts of the world, and has increased the vulnerability of women.
- The current situation must be understood within the larger historical context of aggressive promotion of neo-liberal policies in past decades. The crisis is not new for developing countries that have struggled from the 1970's, with women's groups in particular emphatically voicing their protest and resistance to such policies in terms of their destructive impact on women's livelihoods, increased burden of work and unpaid labour, as well as lost social security. The crisis, however, reached global proportions when it impacted advanced economies and their role in global arenas, thereby bringing out the interconnectedness of the divergent realities in the globalized world.
- National as well as international institutions are facing diverse pressures in the fields of growth, employment, food security and fiscal policy formulation, in terms of framing adequate responses to contain both the financial sector crisis and the meltdown of production and employment all around the globe.
- The crisis provides an opportunity to rethink macro and micro-economic policies, and for those advocating a gender based approach in designing policy frameworks, the crisis provides an opportunity to advance proposals that promote jobs, economic security, human rights, class, gender and ethnicity equality. Reviving the global economy will require policies that focus heavily on job creation and ensure a more equitable and sustainable development process that protects and enhances women's livelihoods.
- As the crisis is now the driving force behind many development choices and processes (from the global to the local), and will shape approaches to development for years to come, the role of women becomes crucial, not merely because of the negative gendered impacts of these crises, but also because women themselves are crucial players in development. They must play a role in proposing approaches to alleviate the impacts of the crisis from within a framework of human rights, environmental sustainability and development

commitments around the world. The inclusion of women and gender equality within a framework of human rights is central to these processes, and an indicator of both the seriousness as well as the efficacy of proposed responses.

The workshop provided an opportunity to learn through collective sharing. There were presentations by activists and trade union leaders, based on their lived experiences of the crisis;

there were well informed accounts of the region from journalists; there were human rights activists and activists from the women's movement who helped see the impact of the crisis within the larger framework; and there were well researched presentations by academicians, especially economists from six South Asian nations - Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. New ideas emerged. There was an impression that the gendered impact of the crisis had

not yet been adequately studied. One of the basic objectives of the workshop had been to come out with recommendations for carrying forward work in this area. The proposed task force for regional monitoring could also work at the national level, and produce a report on the state of women in South Asia. It is important for all of us to work together to carry the agenda forward and not let this be just another set of recommendations.

# Acknowledgement

This report is based on a workshop held in Delhi, India in August 2010 on Global Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impacts on Women: A Human Rights Perspective. The two day workshop brought together diverse leaders from South Asia, and the sessions included extensive sharing of observations and expertise on the crisis with the objective of developing regional strategies.

Many people and organizations have been involved in this project, right from its inception to the publication of this final report. The meeting and the production of this report was supported by UNIFEM and Heinrich Böll Foundation. I am grateful to Anne Stenhammer, Sushma Kapoor and Govind Kelkar from UN Women who saw the critical need for this conversation to happen in South Asia. Govind Kelkar was instrumental in helping conceptualise the workshop and in identifying significant leaders and organizations. Her advice helped in bringing a truly diverse group. I am grateful to Michael Köberlein and Shalini Yog for joining the project as partners.

Devaki Jain provided valuable inputs in structuring the conversation and developing a resource kit with background readings. Butch Montes and Indira Hirway provided useful insights throughout this project, and helped set the context for this conversation. I would also like to express my appreciation for Virginia Bras Gomes, who helped link South Asian realities to some of the international discourses, including the international human rights discourse.

I want to thank all the participants for what turned out to be a very stimulating and inspiring workshop. Their commitment to the work pushed the conversation to new grounds. I appreciate the time and effort each one took to conduct systematic research for their presentations. I am particularly grateful to Indu Agnihotri, Ranja Sengupta, Patricia Mukhim, and Najma Sadeque for chairing sessions and providing insightful interventions. Santosh Mehrotra, Director of Institute of Applied Manpower Research provided the government of India's policy responses.

An extensive background research was undertaken by Veda Bharadwaja and Debika Goswami at PWESCR in planning for the meeting. I am grateful to Garima Sharma from UNDP for providing enough sets of their publications for the resource kit. Shipra Nigam was the workshop rapporteur and helped compile the report. Shalini Mishra co-authored the report. This report was copy edited by Phaedra Engel-Harrison. Ioanna Konstantinou's diligent research helped fill the gaps. Pallavi Gupta helped in the meeting coordination. I am grateful to Sanjay Dhadwal, Office Manager at PWESCR for coordinating the logistics of the workshop along with Harsh Vardhan. Kuldeep Sharma, Accounts Officer at PWESCR, administered the grant funds for this project.

I am grateful to Vinay Aditya and his staff at Systems Vision for designing and printing this report. I would also like to acknowledge Anupama Vijayan's contribution in seeing this publication through.

**Priti Darooka**  
Executive Director  
PWESCR



## Biographies of Participants

The following is a list of biographies of participants in the workshop. Organizational affiliations are listed only for identification purposes and cannot be used to infer endorsement of the thoughts and ideas discussed at the workshop. In addition, organizational affiliations may have since changed.

### **Balasingham Skanthakumar (Sri Lanka)**

Law and Society Trust

lst.kumar@gmail.com

Balasingham is with the Law and Society Trust, a research and advocacy organisation in Colombo, where he directs its Economic, Social and Cultural Rights programme. He is the Editor of Language Rights in Sri Lanka (2008) among other publications. His recent research and writing has been on national human rights institutions, labour relations and the political economy of development.

### **Basanti Majhi (India)**

Seva Bharati

Basanti belongs to the Kutia tribe residing in Kandhamal district of Orissa. She has been working with Seva Bharati (a partner of Skillshare International) for six years. She is currently President of a women's group that works for the rehabilitation of divorced women belonging to the tribal community. Seva Bharati has also been instrumental in setting up Jedaitanu (a network of tribal leaders). She is engaged in raising awareness of villagers on land security and has also been involved in increasing access of tribal peoples to various schemes such as old age pension, widow pension, seed banks, and coverage of the physically disabled under the Social Security Act, and health and sanitation in villages.

### **Bidyutlata Nayak (India)**

Seva Bharati

Bidyut is a tribal woman from Orissa who has completed an MA in Rural Management from National Institute of Social Work and Social Science (NISWASS), Bhubaneswar; videography from NISCARD, Ghaziabad; and DCA from HLC. She is working with Seva Bharati as INRM Field Coordinator. She conducts awareness on the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA and on land and agricultural issues. Bidyut facilitates the involvement of villagers in determining the kind of work that they would need to undertake under NREGA. She is also responsible for ensuring the participation of women in NREGA.

**Farida Akhter (Bangladesh)**

UBINIG (Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona)

farida@ubinig.org

Farida is Executive Director, UBINIG, a policy and action research organization based in Bangladesh working with the farming, weaving and rural and urban communities of the country. She also runs Narigrantha Prabartana, the first and only feminist bookstore and feminist publishing house in Bangladesh. She has led research on many development issues, health, environment and issues of globalization. She has written several books including Depopulating Bangladesh Essays on the Politics of Fertility and Reproductive Rights (1996), and Seeds of Movement: On Women's Issues in Bangladesh (2007).

**Govind Kelkar (India)**

UN Women

govind.kelkar@unifem.org

Govind is the Regional Programme Coordinator of Economic Security and Rights at UN Women, South Asia Office, in New Delhi, India. She has previously taught at Delhi University, the Indian Institute of Technology in Mumbai, and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, Thailand. At AIT, Govind founded the graduate programme in Gender Development Studies, as well as the Gender, Technology and Development Journal, which is published by SAGE, India. She has worked extensively on gender and energy transition in rural Asia. Currently, she is working on indigenous women and climate change in India and China. Govind has contributed numerous articles to scholarly journals focusing on gender relations in Asia, and has been in close contact with women's movements in the region.

**Indu Agnihotri (India)**

Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS)

indu@cwds.ac.in

Indu is currently a Senior Fellow and Deputy Director at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, and has taught history in a New Delhi University College for over two decades. She has been active in the women's movement for more than three decades.

**Indira Hirway (India)**

Centre For Development Alternatives (CFDA)

indira.hirway@cfda.ac.in

Indira holds an MA in Economics from the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, and a Ph. D. from Bombay University. At present she is Director and Professor of Economics at the Centre for Development Alternatives, Ahmedabad. She is a Development Economist focusing on development alternatives. Her recent publications include Restructuring of Production and Labour under Globalization: Study of Textile and Garment Industries (ILO, 2008), Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Workers and Small producers in India: Emerging Issues and Implications (UNDP, 2009). She has been Visiting Faculty/Fellow to Erasmus University, Netherlands; University of Amsterdam, Netherlands; Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford; and University of Utah, USA. She is an Associate of Levy Economics Institute, Bard College in New York State.

**Julie George (India)**

Skillshare International

julie.george@skillshare.org

Julie is originally from southern India and is currently the Regional Director for Skillshare International, Asia Programme. Her areas of expertise include advocacy, agriculture and rural livelihoods, gender based violence, health, human rights, gender, institutionalizing gender, poverty, and strategic planning in the South Asian region. She was previously working with UN Women South Asia Regional Office (SARO) where she was Programme Officer for Economic Empowerment.

**Lucky Sherpa (Nepal)**

National Network of Indigenous Women (NNIW)

sherpalucky@yahoo.com

Lucky is an Honourable Member of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal and a well known advocate of Federalism with an inclusive democracy. She has been recognised as Youth Ambassador for Peace (2007) and Young Women Human Rights Leader by World Youth Federation for Peace and MADRE, an International Women's Human Right Organisation. She is the first Sherpa (indigenous mountain woman) student to obtain a Masters in Economics and earn Faculty Top Student in the same (2001) from Tribhuvan University, Patan Campus. Lucky is a Member of the Parliamentarians for Global Action Network and Treasurer for Nepal Chapter of Parliamentarians for Global Action. She is an Advisor for the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), NGO-Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities (NGO-FONIN), and the National Network of Indigenous Women (NNIW).

**Manuel F. Montes (USA)**

UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

montes@un.org

Manuel is Chief of Development Strategy and Policy Analysis in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). He was previously Chief of Policy Analysis and Development in the UN Financing for Development Office. Before that, he was Regional Programme Coordinator, Asia Pacific Trade and Investment Initiative, UNDP Regional Centre in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He has been a visiting scholar at the Institute for Developing Economies in Tokyo, at the United Nations University/World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/IWDER) in Helsinki, and at the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS). He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Stanford University. His research has focused on economic development, with an emphasis on the roles of macroeconomic policies and social inequality.

**Maria Virginia Bras Gomes (Portugal)**

UN CESCR (United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

Virginia.B.Gomes@seg-social.pt

Virginia was born in Goa, India, and is currently based in Lisbon, Portugal, where she works as a Senior Social Policy Advisor in the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. She is a member (since 2003) and presently Vice-Chair, of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Virginia is also Co-rapporteur for the General Comment on the Right to Social Security (November 2007) and Rapporteur for the Revised Guidelines for national reports on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. She's also a member of the Scientific Committee for the Third World Forum on Human Rights (Nantes); of the Board of Trustees of the European Roma Rights Centre Foundation (Hungary); of the European Social Network high level advisory group on de-institutionalisation; of the Board of the Portuguese UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Committee and of the Executive Committee of the International Centre for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Recent publications include *The Future of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Individualisation and the Crumbling of the Welfare State* (Palgrave Macmillan); *Human Rights and Development: The Two Sides of the Same Coin* (Iboorberg Verlag GmbH and Co, KG); and *Multicultural Europe: Combating Racism and Intolerance* (French National Consultative Commission for Human Rights). Virginia is also a member of the PWESCR International Board of Trustees.

**Massouda Jalal (Afghanistan)**

Jalal Foundation

jalalfoundation@hotmail.com

Massouda studied medicine at the University of Kabul in the early 1980s, and remained on the Faculty of Medicine until 1996. She has worked with national and international NGOs including the International Committee of the Red Cross, Medicines Sans Frontiers, the United Nations International Labour Organisation, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). During the time of the Taliban she worked for the United Nations World Food Programme, distributing food and other life necessities to women and children. She operated clandestine programmes, encouraged in-home education of girls, and nurtured the development of home-based entrepreneurial activities by widows and other isolated women. She was the only female candidate for President of the Republic of Afghanistan, and accepted the position of Minister of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan (2004-2006). She initiated 18 women empowering national programmes to bring fundamental positive changes in the lives of Afghan women. Her energies now are dedicated to the launching of women's organisations including Jalal Foundation, the first to respond exclusively to the needs of women and girls.

**Musa Mahmoodi (Afghanistan)**

AIHRC (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission)

mahmodi@aihrc.org.af; aihrc@aihrc.org.af

Mohammad is the Executive Director of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). He holds a law Degree from Kabul University and a MPA and MAIR from Maxwell School, Syracuse University, USA. He is a committed Human Rights activist and lawyer with over ten years of experience in the field of human rights promotion and protection in Afghanistan. He has worked as Director of Equal Rights Association (ERA), Director of Bamyan Regional Office of AIHRC and Deputy Country Director of National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Afghanistan. Mohammad Musa Mahmoodi is also a Member of the Board of the Fair and Free Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA).

**Mridul Epan (India)**  
**Kerala State Planning Board**  
mridul@cds.ac.in

Mridul is currently a Member of the Kerala State Planning Board and Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Trivandrum. At CDS she has worked in the areas of small and traditional industries, employment and gender, with a focus on women and work. She obtained her Ph. D. from Erasmus University, The Netherlands, with her research on Rural Industrialisation in Kerala: Its Dynamics and Local Linkages. Her work on gender includes a study on Demystifying the High Status of Women in Kerala: A Study in Social Contradictions, and at the Planning Board, Mridul is actively engaged in the gender sensitising plan and budget making with the cooperation of the State Departments. She has been undertaking a Gender Sensitive Analysis of the Kerala State Budget for the last 2-3 years.

**Najma Sadeque (Pakistan)**  
**Shirkat Gah - Women's Resource Centre**  
nsadeque@gmail.com

Najma has been a journalist for over 25 years; spending about equal time with the DAWN Group, and The NEWS International, where she was an Assistant Editor for 11 years. She is widely travelled, covering NGO, UN and other conferences, workshops and orientations for the press, as well as working with NGOs. For the last eight years she has been with Shirkat Gah as Director of the Green Economics and Globalisation Initiative that focuses on research on economic, agricultural, labour and livelihoods, environmental, globalisation, debt and human rights issues with special reference to women. Najma is currently working on having documentary advocacy and training films made. She has published a number of works for PANOS Institute of London and Shirkat Gah.

**Nimalka Fernando (Sri Lanka)**  
**IMADR (International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism)**  
imadrn@sltnet.lk

Nimalka is an Attorney-at-Law. She began her legal practice as a labour lawyer in the mid 1980s. Subsequently she began working on human rights cases and worked closely with the Civil Rights Movement in Sri Lanka as a junior apprentice. In 1983 she joined the civil society to work as Secretary of the Development Commission of the National Christian Council. She joined the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development based in Malaysia in 1989 and worked as Regional

Coordinator. She was appointed President of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality in Sri Lanka and has been involved in the work of Asia Regional Exchange for New Alternatives, South Asia Forum for Human Rights and the People's SAARC processes. Presently she is the President of the International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism based in Japan.

**Padmini Weerasooriya (Sri Lanka)**  
**Mothers and Daughters of Lanka**  
imadrn@sltnet.lk

Padmini began as a factory worker and then quality controller at Polytex Garment in 1982-1985 and joined the Industrial Transport and General Workers Union and was appointed Branch Secretary. In 1984 the workers launched a strike demanding compensation, one of the historic struggles during a repressive period in Sri Lanka. The workers also protested against the suspension of workers. Padmini was a leader in these struggles and was dismissed. She joined the Women's Centre established to work with the FTZ workers. She is now the President and continues to fight for the rights of women workers in the FTZs. She has served as a committee member representing Sri Lanka in the regional network CAW and was involved in Garment Factory Research facilitated by TIE-Asia. She is also serving as the Convenor of Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, a network of women's organisations.

**Patricia Mukhim (India)**  
**Indigenous Women Resource Centre**  
patricia.mukhim@gmail.com

Patricia is currently Editor of the Shillong Times, Meghalaya, and a columnist for the Telegraph and the Statesman. She is also Director of the Indigenous Women's Resource Centre, North-East India. Patricia is involved in gender sensitization across the North-East and trains rural women on how to access their rights. She has conducted several studies on the status of women in the North-East and their plight in conflict situations as well as in enabling their access and control over land. She is currently on the Board of Governors, Central Agricultural University, Imphal; is a Member of the Environmental Advisory Board of the North-Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCo) and is also a Member of Meghalaya State Coordination Committee to Combat Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Women. She is a Trustee of the Centre for North-East Studies and Policy Research and is the founding member of Shillong We Care, an organisation that campaigns against militancy in North-East India.

**Priti Darooka (India)**

PWESCR (Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

[pdarooka@pwescr.org](mailto:pdarooka@pwescr.org)

Priti is the Founder and Executive Director of the international Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR). She was previously with the Ford Foundation, in the New York human rights unit, and has focused on promoting women and their economic social and cultural rights (ESCR). Prior to the Ford Foundation, she was with UN Women, where she worked on violence against women indicators, assessing and coordinating UNIFEM's work in Afghanistan. As a consultant to the Center for Women's Global Leadership, she organised a women's human rights hearing at the UN Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. She was the National Campaign Coordinator with UNITE for their Global Justice for Garment Workers Campaign.

Priti has also worked with Manavi, a South Asian women's organisation working with women and children who have faced violence in their lives. At Urban Justice Center (UJC), she worked with the NYC Welfare Reform and Human Rights Documentation Project, where she developed a policy brief on welfare reform and women, which were used as media and advocacy tools by welfare advocates of NYC to expose human rights violations. She was also involved in the Stop Free Trade Area of Americas (FTAA) campaign and focused on different aspects of trade and women's lives, from a feminist and human rights perspective.

**Ranja Sengupta (India)**

Third World Network

[ranja.sengupta@gmail.com](mailto:ranja.sengupta@gmail.com)

Ranja is an economist by training and works as Senior Researcher with the Third World Network. From her base in New Delhi, she has been working on issues related to international trade and development, human development, and agriculture. She has worked extensively on globalisation and its linkage to income, regional and gender inequalities, on agrarian relations and agricultural growth. Recently she has been focusing on Free Trade Agreements and their impacts on development potential and social justice. The gender impact of Free Trade Agreements has been a major focus of her recent work.

**Santosh Mehrotra (India)**

Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Planning Commission, Government of India

[santosh.mehrotra@nic.in](mailto:santosh.mehrotra@nic.in)

Santosh is a human development economist and Director General of the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (Planning Commission, Government of India). He was a lead author of India's 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012), and also leads the team on the next India Human Development Report. He was Regional Economic Advisor, Regional Centre for Asia, UNDP, Bangkok (2005-06), and was chief economist of UNDP global Human Development Report (2002-05). After obtaining his Ph. D. from Cambridge (1985), Santosh worked as Associate Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi (1988-1991). He was also with the UN for 15 years (1991-2006). His books include *Universalising Elementary Education in India*, *Uncaging the Tiger Economy* (OUP, 2005); *The Economics of Elementary Education in India* (Sage, 2006); *Asian Informal Workers, Global Risks, Local Protection* (Routledge, London); *Eliminating Human Poverty: Macro-economic Policies for Equitable Growth* (Zed, London).

**Sapana Pradhan Malla (Nepal)**

Forum for Women Law and Development (FWLD)

[fwld@fwld.wlink.com.np](mailto:fwld@fwld.wlink.com.np)

Sapana as the Founding President of FWLD has long been considered an institution on discourses on women's jurisprudence in Nepal. In this capacity she was the driving force behind the drafting of the Gender Equity Amendment Act and a model Human Trafficking Act. Recently, Sapana has heightened her efforts for upholding women's rights under the transitional process in Nepal's Governance, through her engagement with the constitution making process as an elected member of the Constituent Assembly. A significant achievement was coordinating the sub-committee that finalized the Bill on Domestic Violence, resulting in the enactment of the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act, 2008.

## **V. Rukmini Rao (India)**

### **Gramya Resource Centre for Women**

vrukminirao@yahoo.com; vrukmini@hd2.dot.net.in

As a founding member of Saheli Collective in New Delhi, Rukmini campaigned during the 1980s to create public awareness around issues related to domestic violence against women and to bring in legislation to recognise women's rights. From 1990 she worked with Dalit and indigenous women (Koya and Lambadi) as well as with women from marginalised communities to organise and promote livelihood activities. She has supported women's leadership development to manage food sovereignty programmes, land lease programmes and common land development programmes in Medak district, Andhra Pradesh. In Khammam District, she has worked with Koya indigenous women take up sustainable livelihoods. In Nalgonda district, she supports Lambadi women's resistance to the selling of baby girls and works towards improvement of their livelihood opportunities. As a consultant to the Government of Orissa, she has promoted mainstreaming gender issues through watershed management. She continues to provide training and support to voluntary organisations across the country.

## **Biographies of PWESCR's Staff**

### **Debika Goswami**

#### *Programme Associate*

Debika holds a Bachelor's as well as a Master's Degree in History (with a specialisation in Social History) from Presidency College, University of Calcutta. She has also received her Master's Degree in 'Non-farm Activities and Rural Development in Developing Countries' from the University of Rome, La Sapienza. Before joining PWESCR, she served as a Research and Documentation Executive in a NGO, Udyogini, working for livelihood and enterprise promotion of poor rural women in six states of the country. She has also worked with an Italian Donor Agency, Pangeaonlus as a Focal Point and Research Liaison Officer in India. She has travelled extensively in both North and South rural India, documenting cases and monitoring closely the actual state of women in the countryside.

### **Harsh Vardhan**

#### *Administrative Officer*

Harsh obtained his B.Sc. Degree in Psychology from Annamalai University. Currently, he is pursuing his Master's Degree in Social Work from IGNOU. He has five years of work experience in both administration and projects related to community development. Previously, he worked with Ideosync Media Combine, an organisation that works towards integrating innovative communication methodologies into development and social change initiatives and programmes. As the Administrative In-charge, Harsh worked on the administrative part of two radio series focused on safe migration and HIV/AIDS, which were aired on All India Radio and World Space. Prior to that, he worked with CASP-Plan as a Project Coordinator where he initiated the working children project. Harsh also won the Adobe Youth Voices award in 2006 for making the best video and photo story.

### **Ioanna Konstantinou**

#### *Intern*

Ioanna completed her BA in International Relations and Diplomacy with a Minor in Psychology at the American College of Thessaloniki, Greece. She received a prize for excellence in Hellenic, International Affairs, and human rights. During her graduate studies she undertook an internship at the Greek State Archives entitled 'Introduction to archival procedures and research in administrative archival documents relating to immigration in northern Greece with a special focus on gender'. She recently obtained with merits her MSc in Human Rights and International Politics with a special focus on Gender and Development issues and more particularly on Hindu women's empowerment. Currently, Ioanna is occupied as an intern at PWESCR and will be working on research relating to women's livelihood issues.

### **Pallavi Gupta**

#### *Programme Officer-Training*

Pallavi holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. Prior to TISS she completed her LLB from ILS Law College, Pune. She previously worked as Programme Coordinator for Asmita Resource Centre for Women, Secunderabad. She has worked on issues of violence against women, Human rights education in colleges, sexual harassment in the workplace, CEDAW and women's rights. As Programme Officer (Training) at PWESCR, she is assisting with the organisation's training initiatives.

## Phaedra Engel-Harrison

### *Intern*

Phaedra holds a Masters in Human Rights from the University of Sydney, Australia, as well as a Bachelor of Arts from Southern Cross University and a Diploma in Journalism. She worked as a journalist in Australia before deciding to utilise her communication skills in the humanitarian sector. She spent time in the pacific nation of East Timor with a local NGO researching and producing a report demonstrating how grassroots action can better protect and promote human rights. She has also recently worked in non-profit fundraising in Australia and the U.S. as a campaign manager raising money for organisations such as UNHCR, Medicins Sans Frontieres, CARE Australia and CHILDFUND. She is currently working with PWESCR in India assisting with their communications and fundraising strategies.

## Sanjay Dhadwal

### *Office Manager*

Sanjay holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Economics. He is an administration and finance professional with 17 years of experience in the field. A great believer in the NGO sector, he was the National Director (Administration) with Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) for seven years. With tremendous interpersonal and administrative skills, Sanjay has organised and implemented several staff benefit schemes. He has also initiated and activated systems and procedures in accounting, finance, and administration.

## Sayantoni Datta

### *Programme Officer-Research*

Sayantoni has graduated from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai with an MA in urban and rural development studies and has been working in the field of human rights and development for the last ten years. She was earlier associated with South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (SADED)/Centre for Studies on Developing Societies (CSDS) where she organised dialogues and research on behalf of grassroots movements engaged in ecological justice issues as well as with child rights initiatives and the right to education campaigns during her association with Child Rights and You (CRY). She has worked on a pioneer research initiative supported by the UNDP and Planning Commission, called the People's Report of Chhattisgarh, 2005, and a study on the impact of SEZs on agriculture and livestock communities in Gujarat and Punjab in 2009. Sayantoni is committed to human rights and environmental justice issues, and the main focus of her work has been tribal areas. She has a firm belief in building critical perspectives, creative processes and democratic principles within the praxis of organisations and movements as a means to building a positive human rights culture for the future.

## Shalini Mishra

### *Programme Officer-Research*

Shalini completed her Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2003. Her thesis was titled, 'The Power Structure and Forms of Peasant Resistance in Eastern Rajasthan in the 17th and 18th Centuries'. She was awarded the Junior Fellowship for pursuit of doctoral studies by the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund. She worked at the Centre for Women's Development Studies from 1997 to 1999 and has been working as a Consultant on a range of issues for various civil society organizations based in New Delhi. Before joining PWESCR, she worked as a Senior Researcher at HLRN (Housing and Land Rights Network). She is principal author of the HLRN report on the Commonwealth Games, The 2010 Commonwealth Games: Whose Wealth? Whose Commons?

## Shipra Nigam

### *Consultant*

Shipra is currently doing her Ph.D. through the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, JNU, New Delhi. She holds an M.Phil from JNU, and has graduated from Lady Shri Ram College. Her focus areas are Economic Theory, Macroeconomics of growth and development, Feminist economics and economics of gender. She was a Fulbright Doctoral and Professional Research Fellow at the New School of Social Research, New York, in 2008-09.

## Veda Bharadwaja

### *Programme Associate for South Asia*

Veda holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, as well as a Masters in Politics (specialisation in International Relations) from JNU, New Delhi. Before joining PWESCR, she was a Programme Associate with Amnesty International India, where she was in charge of the Response Desk and the ESCR – Housing and Dignity campaign. Veda has also worked with International Market Assessment India Private Limited (IMA, India) in New Delhi and with NDTV 24/7 as a Research Intern. In addition, she has been a member of the National Social Service Scheme, and has volunteered with the Child Development Programme. She organised and participated in a workshop on disability issues, hosted by CAN (Concerned Action Now) New Delhi in September 2003.



DD-29, Nehru Enclave, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Kalkaji, New Delhi 110019, India

Tel: +91-11-40536091-93 • Fax: +91-11-40536095 • [pwescr@pwescr.org](mailto:pwescr@pwescr.org) • [www.pwescr.org](http://www.pwescr.org)