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FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON W O M E N

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الرابعة العالمية
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第四次
妇女问题世界

QUATRIÈME
CONFÉRENCE MONDIALE
SUR LES FEMMES

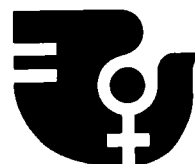
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ЧЕТВЕРТАЯ ВСЕМИРНАЯ
КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ ПО ПОЛОЖЕНИЮ
ЖЕНЩИН

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***ACTION* FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE**
4-15 SEPTEMBER 1995 · BEIJING, CHINA

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Fourth World Conference on Women

4-15 September 1995
Beijing, China

Action for Equality,
Development and Peace

CONTENTS

Basic Information

- A brochure on the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW). It gives the background to the Conference and outlines the preparatory process involved.
- A pamphlet on the **Draft Platform for Action**, the main document to be adopted in Beijing. It summarizes the 12 "critical areas of concern" identified in the **Platform** and lists main recommendations proposed for removing the existing obstacles facing today's women.

Press Summary

- Summary of three UN documents prepared for the Conference. All three reflect the progress the world's women have made since the adoption in 1985 of the **Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women** to the Year 2000 and focus on obstacles they encounter in their search for equality.
- **i. The Second Review and Appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.** Based on national reports submitted by 130 UN Member Countries and various UN organizations and in the light of the NFLS, it presents an analysis of women's advancement in key areas identified by the **Draft Platform for Action**.
- **ii. 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development.** Prepared by the United Nations Secretariat, the Survey analyses three central development issues — poverty, productive employment and economic decision-making.
- **iii. The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics.** A statistical source book, it presents comparative information on women and men in such areas as family, economic and political life. It provides numbers and analysis needed to help understand how conditions differ for women and men and how they are changing.



Features

- Six features illustrate types of discrimination women and girl children worldwide face both at home and in society. Based on real-life stories and interviews.

Fact sheets

- 10 fact sheets. Contain latest statistics, drawn from the three key FWCW documents.

Graphics/ Photographs

- 13 camera-ready graphic illustrations and a selection of black and white photographs.



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This media package was prepared by the Department of Public Information in association with Women's Feature Service.



Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
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DPI/1715/Wom-95-20350-July 1995-20M



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**Fourth World Conference
on Women**
4-15 September 1995
Beijing, China
Action for Equality,
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Summary of the second review and appraisal of the **Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women**

The *Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000* (NFLS), adopted in Nairobi at the 1985 third UN conference on women, provided a framework for action at the national, regional and international levels to promote greater equality and opportunity for women. The first review and appraisal of the *Strategies* was issued in 1990.

The *Second Review and Appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies*, issued as a main document of the Fourth World

Conference on Women, has been prepared on the basis of information contained in national reports received by the Conference Secretariat from 130 UN Member States by 1 December 1994, the results of regional conferences held in connection with the Fourth World Conference on Women and information

provided by specialized agencies of the UN system. It also draws on gender statistics assembled by the UN Statistical Division. Structured around the draft *Platform for Action*, the key document submitted for adoption in Beijing, the *Review and Appraisal* should be seen as the factual support for the conclusions and recommendations in the *Platform*.

Re-assessing progress

Change in the work and lives of women all over the world is related to change in the global economic, social, and political environment. Given the dramatic turns of the last decade, in tandem with women's historically unequal status in society, women's position has been shifting across the international spectrum. Though gains have

occurred, to a degree, in all countries, poverty, violence, and the lack of access to education, among other issues, remain pressing concerns for women. In this context the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies (NFLS) are being re-assessed.

The NFLS pointed out that the growing "feminization" of poverty — poverty growing faster for women than for men — poses a threat to both development and democracy. In the hopes of eradicating inequality between men and women and discrimination against women, some recent recommendations have been made, such as directing resources to poor women; ensuring access to education and health services; changing laws to ensure equal access to land, assets, and employment; providing adequate safety nets; and enabling the rural and urban poor to analyse their own situation and express their priorities.

Fighting illiteracy

Literacy and functional literacy have risen in the last decade. Girls' school enrolment is now comparable with that of boys, with the exception of Africa and Asia. There, cost, culture, and economics favour the education of male over female children, if education is a priority at all. Programmes have increased in non-formal education, alternative education, and education for special groups of girls and women, such as migrants, aboriginals, the impoverished, and the disabled.

Governments have agreed to encourage all schools to examine educational tools; eliminate discriminatory stereotyping; redesign textbooks to reflect a positive and dynamic image of women; and include women's studies in their curricula.

A small percentage of female students who do seek higher education go on to enter the formerly male-dominated fields of science and technology, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the majority continue to



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Summary of the 1994 world survey on

The Role of Women in Development

The *1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, one of the main documents for the Fourth World Conference on Women, examines the impact of three key issues affecting women: poverty, employment, and economic decision-making. Economic development is linked to women's advancement. Where women have made strides, economic growth has been steady; where women have been locked out of development, economies have stagnated. The *World Survey* explores how social and economic development can be used to build a more secure future for humankind.

Moving to a gender analysis



The women in development (WID) movement that emerged in the early 1970s successfully put women's advancement on the international agenda. Unlike past development models that stressed women's reproductive role, the WID approach focused on incorporating women into social and economic development strategies.

In recent years, however, the WID philosophy has been overtaken by a more complex and comprehensive analysis of development by gender. Gender analysis views women and men in terms of the roles they play in society, roles which change as societies change. Gender relations are the social, economic and political relations that determine gender identity. Since gender relations shape women's access to resources, their work opportunities and their roles in family and public life, they also determine women's status. Gender relations also frame male behaviour, responsibilities and entitlements.

By comparing women and men rather than looking at women as an isolated group, gender analysis illuminates key aspects of society's struc-

ture, making it easier to identify the obstacles to improving society and to finding solutions to women's issues.

Evaluating progress. Aftershocks from the political and economic upheavals of the last decade are still being evaluated. A global recession that lasted well over five years is just beginning a cautious recovery. Women's economic activity must be examined in terms of these ongoing changes, which include globalization of markets and production, structural adjustments, rapid technological innovations and growing economic interdependence.

Two significant changes have occurred over the past 10 years. One is the change in women's legal status in the direction of equality. This is reflected in the increase in the number of countries that are party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (139, as of May 1995). The other is women's achievement of equal access to education and training. By 1990, in most countries girls had the same access to primary education as boys. Even more progress has been made in second and third levels of education. However, there are regional differences, with Africa and South Asia being less rapid in closing the gap between boys and girls.

These developments have provided equal opportunities for an increasing number of women and allowed them to utilize the skills and priorities that derive from their gender roles. However, progress in developing and developed countries has been uneven and obstacles to women's advancement remain everywhere. Girls are still channelled into fields of study regarded as suitable for women, which prevents them from taking on the challenges of a technology-driven society. Adult illiteracy continues to be a primary problem for women, relegating them to a lesser standing in society.

Structural adjustment programmes. The WID approach to development, dominant during the 1980s, is now known by many as the decade of



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Fourth World Conference on Women

4-15 September 1995

Beijing, China

Action for Equality,
Development and Peace

An overview of

The World's Women in 1995

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

How different are these worlds? Anecdote and misperception abound, in large part because good information has been lacking. As a result, policy has been ill-informed, strategy unfounded and practice unquestioned. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. It is changing because advocates of women's interests have done much in the past 20 years to sharpen people's awareness of the importance of gender concerns. It is changing because this growing awareness has, by raising new questions and rephrasing old, greatly increased the demand for better statistics to inform and focus the debate. And it is changing because women's contributions—and women's rights—have moved to the centre of social and economic change, as it became apparent in the series of international conferences held by the UN in recent years, including the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development

(Cairo, 1994) and the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen 1995).

To promote action on the new consensus to empower women, this second edition of *The World's Women* builds on the first one which was issued in 1991, presenting statistical summaries of health, schooling, family life, work and public life. It presents few global figures, focusing instead on country data and regional averages. There are myriad differences among countries in every field and *The World's Women* tries to find a meaningful balance between detailed country statements and broad generalization.

Education for empowerment

In the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, education is considered one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in development processes. Educated women marry later, want fewer children, are more likely to use effective methods of contraception and have greater means to improve their economic livelihood.

Through widespread promotion of universal primary education, literacy rates for women have increased over the past few decades—to at least 75 per cent in most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and eastern and south-eastern Asia. But high rates of illiteracy among women still prevail in much of Africa and in parts of Asia. And when illiteracy is high it almost always is accompanied by large differences in rates between women and men.

At intermediate levels of education, girls have made progress in their enrolment in school through the second level. The primary-secondary enrolment ratio is now about equal for girls and boys in the developed regions and Latin America and the Caribbean and is approaching near



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**Fourth World Conference
on Women**

4-15 September 1995

Beijing, China

Action for Equality,
Development and Peace

War and Peace

At times of national or international armed conflicts, women are affected in many ways. Though they may have no role in decisions leading to such conflicts and seldom are combatants themselves, women are often left to maintain families when social and economic life is disrupted.

Women casualties

- The casualties of war are increasingly women and children. About 90% of war casualties were military at the beginning of this century. About 90% of war casualties are civilian today.⁶
- Throughout history, women have been subjected to rape as part of war, most recently documented from Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda.¹⁰



- A survey by Rwanda's Ministry of Family and Women's Affairs in Kigali and several other prefectures estimated that between April 1994 and 10 April 1995 more than 15,700 women and girls aged 13-65 were raped, more than 1,100 gave birth and 5,200 had abortions.³¹

The military industry's human cost

- The chances of dying from social neglect (malnutrition and preventable disease) are 33 times greater than the chances of dying in a war or from external aggression in developing countries. However, there is an average of 20 soldiers for every one physician in developing countries.⁶
- In 1990, around 1.5 million of the five to seven million people employed in research and development in industrialized countries were in the military sector.⁶

- More than 100 million uncleared land-mines are estimated to exist in the world, causing one of the three most serious public health hazards alongside malaria and tuberculosis in countries such as Cambodia.²²
- During 40 years of Soviet nuclear testing in Kazakhstan, on more than 2,000 square kilometres of prime agricultural land, 10,000 people were irradiated. By 1988, the incidence of cancer was 70% greater than the Soviet Union national average.²³
- Only one hour of the operating costs of a B-B1 bomber, US\$ 21,000, is enough to provide community-based maternal health care in 10 African villages to reduce maternal deaths by half in one decade.²⁴
- The export of major conventional arms shows a decrease from 1988 to 1992 (in millions of US\$, 1990):⁶

	1988	1992
USA	12,204	8,429
Former USSR/Russia	14,658	2,043
France	2,403	1,151
Germany	1,241	1,928
China	2,161	1,535
U.K.	1,704	952

Diplomacy

Women continue to be largely absent among the highest ranks of the permanent missions to the UN. As of January 1994, seven missions out of 186 were headed by women; out of 240 delegates holding ambassadorial rank, only 11 were women; and in the Permanent Missions of 67 Member States, there were no women at all.⁹

- The percentage of women diplomats by region: Latin America and the Caribbean (37.5%); Western Europe and Other (29%); Africa (19.4%); Asia and the Pacific (9.3%); and Eastern Europe (8.6%).⁹



Military and police

- In only 13 out of 45 researched countries do women comprise more than 10% of the military service members.¹
- The combat role is open to women in a few countries, including Belgium, Canada, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Venezuela and Zambia.¹
- Many countries have reported a participation of women in the police force, and in most of these countries women's participation is increasing; the highest reporting of female police chiefs is 13%. Most women police officers were assigned to areas dealing with rape and women prisoners.¹
- Data from Brazil's special police stations show that women-only units have greatly facilitated the reporting of abuse. In Sao Paulo, reported rape cases went from 67 in 1985 (before the women's stations were open), to 841 in 1990.¹⁰

UN peace-keeping

- For selected years from 1957 to 1989, there were 20 women out of a total of nearly 10,000 military personnel.⁹ From 1989 to 1992, this figure rose to 255, little more than 1% of the total.³
- Out of the 17 peace-keeping operations in 1993, 2% of the military contingents were women.³
- Women have played a larger role in peace-keeping's non-military sector. From 1957 to 1991, women comprised 5-23% of the international civilian staff serving in UN peace-keeping operations.³
- In the only all-civilian peace and security mission — the UN Observer Mission to South Africa in 1993 — about half of the international staff were women, and over 50% of them were team leaders for the major part of the mission.³

When women make a difference

- In 1980 in Denmark, three housewives organized half a million women to successfully petition for the ban of cruise missiles on Danish territory.⁹
- In Argentina, the women of the Plaza de Mayo are widely regarded as responsible for bringing international attention to the "disappeared" through defiant, silent demonstrations during the military dictatorship (1976-1983).⁹
- The peace-keeping operation during Namibia's transition to freedom, 1989-1990, is widely considered one of the most successful. In a breakthrough for challenging peace-keeping roles for women, over 40% of the professional staff were women. Staff selection was based on background, experience and regional balance rather than a deliberate policy of selecting women.³

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Increase and strengthen the participation of women in conflict resolution and decision-making and leadership in peace and security activities and protect women in armed and other conflicts.
- Increase the percentage of women at all decision-making levels, which may make or influence peace-keeping policy.
- Ensure that international judicial bodies are able to address cases involving rape, indecent assault, and other forms of violence against women; and strengthen women's participation in national reconciliation and reconstruction.



**Fourth World Conference
on Women**

4-15 September 1995

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Action for Equality,
Development and Peace

Human Rights

The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights (June 1993) reaffirmed that human rights of women and the girl child are inalienable, integral, and indivisible parts of universal human rights.

Global trends

It may not be the content of the law which is the major obstacle to women's advancement for equality, but rather the commitment with which Governments adhere to the provisions of the laws, and the attitudes of the judiciary, law enforcement officials, and society at large.

- In the past decade a growing number of countries has supported the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women which legally binds them to achieve equal rights for women in political, economic, social, cultural, and civil fields.² Adopted in 1979, as of May 1995 it had been signed by 139 governments.¹



• Even though female infanticide has been outlawed by many countries, cases are still frequently reported.

- In many countries, lack of awareness of one's legal rights, and of how to exercise them, remains an obstacle to women's access to full and equal human rights.

**Dualistic legal systems
and ineffective laws**

In many countries society remains influenced and regulated by traditional customary and religious practices and regulations, often in direct conflict with the principles of international human rights standards and national laws.¹

- Several multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries have dualistic legal systems that perpetuate sex discrimination, especially in the area of personal and family law.¹
- In a number of countries, the right of inheritance to property, by cultural tradition and custom, still belongs to male heirs only, even when by secular law the rights could be shared equally between women and men.¹
- Despite international legislation, including the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, trafficking in women for prostitution continues. A growth has been reported in sex work trafficking among Eastern European women and from eastern to western Europe.³

Laws stacked against women

- Until a 1989 legal reform, a husband in Ecuador had the right to force his wife to live with him no matter how abusive he may have been.¹⁰
- Laws in Chile and Guatemala specifically exonerate a man who agrees to marry the girl he has raped; his marriage to the victim is perceived as restoring her and her family's honour.¹⁰
- In the secular laws of a number of countries, only a husband (and not the wife) can obtain a divorce on the grounds of adultery.¹

Legal literacy

Reports from Asia and Africa indicate that women are still often fearful, reluctant, not willing, or not comfortable in pursuing judicious settlements through litigation — especially on family disagreements.¹

- Legal literacy programmes and media strategies in many countries are effective in helping women understand the link between their



rights and other aspects of their lives.

- Women have been able to make important inroads in law at the third level. In 1990, the number of women enrolled per 100 men were: Caribbean (119), developed regions (103), Latin America (80), East and South-East Asia (75), North Africa (55), West Asia (43), sub-Saharan Africa (39), and South Asia (25).³
- Legal training is providing new opportunities for women to enter high-level governmental and political positions. The percentage of women in Law and Justice positions in government in 1994 ranged wildly from lows of 0% in East, Southeast and Central Asia and 0.9% in Eastern Europe, to highs of 22.2% in the Caribbean, 16.7% in northern Africa, and 14.6% in Central America.³

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

► Create or strengthen national institutions for the protection and promotion of women's human rights.

► Develop a human rights education programme to raise awareness among women and men of women's human rights.

► Promote and protect the full and equal enjoyment by women and men of all human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinions, national or social origins, property, birth or other status.

► Ensure that women have equal right with men to be judges, advocates or other officers of the court as well as police officers and prison and detention officers.

Women make inroads in legal education

Average ratio of girls to boys in law and business in third-level education by region, 1970-1990 (Number of girls per 100 boys)

Region	1970	1980	1990
Africa	12	43	36
Asia and the Pacific	25	56	70
Eastern Europe	64	134	124
Latin America and the Caribbean	30	92	97
Western Europe and other	25	54	85
World	25	63	102

Source: Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Secretariat, from data contained in the Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base (Wistat), version 3.





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The Girl Child

Girls are at a higher risk of dying before the age of 5 than boys in a number of countries, despite their biological advantage of being more resistant to infection and malnutrition.

Childhood health

- More boys than girls are immunized and treated by hospitals.¹⁷
- In Colombia, only 75 deaths of boys aged 1-2 occur for every 100 deaths of girls.¹
- In Haiti, among every 1,000 children aged 2-5, 61 girls and 48 boys die.¹⁷
- In India, there are only 957 females aged 4 years or under for every 1,000 males in the population.¹



Son preference

The estimated loss in female lives represented by physical neglect of girl children is between 60 and 100 million worldwide.¹⁶

- While the standard "biological" sex ratio is estimated at 93-96 female births per 100 male, deviations have been found. In 1988-1989, 91 girls were born per 100 boys in India.³
- Son preference is more evident in higher-order births. Data indicate that the ratio of female to male births decreases at higher birth orders, suggesting that couples who already have children are less likely to accept another daughter.³
- In a poll of 640 families in one southern Asian community, 51% admitted to having killed a girl baby within a week of her birth.⁶

Harmful traditional practices

Female genital mutilation (FGM), a harmful traditional practice in some countries, can cause trau-

ma, swelling, haemorrhage, obstruction of urine and menstrual flow, and risk of AIDS transmission. It can lead to lifelong physical and psychological scars or serious injury and death.¹

- At least 2 million girls are believed to undergo FGM every year; approximately 6,000 per day. Girls most commonly experience FGM at 4-8 years of age.

Education

- Primary school enrolment for girls and boys from 1960 to 1989 more than tripled in Africa and doubled in Asia and Latin America.¹
- Almost half of the children of primary-school age in Africa are still out of school, the majority of them girls.¹
- In 1993, approximately 60% of the 130 million children aged 6-11 who were not in school were girls.⁸
- In 1990 southern Asian girls were found to spend on average only 1.26 years in school, a slight rise from 1.16 years in 1980.¹

A girl's working day

- According to a government study in Nepal, the work burden of girls in both the 6-9 and 10-14 age groups is much heavier than that of boys in the same age group in both rural and urban areas.¹⁸

Positive programmes for girls

- As of April 1995, 173 countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Genetic testing for sex selection has been banned officially in India under the 1994 Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Bill, and in China since January 1995.¹
- The seven-member South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation has created programmes to raise the age of marriage and provide girls



with health care and other services, and declared 1991-2000 the Decade of the Girl Child.^{30, 32}

- Through the Organization of African Unity, in 1990 African nations adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, with a special focus on girls.³⁰
- Throughout southern Asia, a UNICEF-initiated multimedia campaign projects an empowering view of a little girl named Meena. Through television programmes, video and comic books, the Meena Initiative targets both parents and children in an effort to change negative images of girls.

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Implement policies, plans of action and programmes for the survival, protection, development and advancement of the girl child.
- Set up educational programmes to sensitize adults to the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices on girl children.
- Eliminate discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference and such unethical practices as infanticide and prenatal sex selection.
- Ensure universal and equal access to and the completion of primary education and eliminate the gap between girls and boys.

Unequal from childhood

Time use of children in rural areas
Number of hours spent per day in different activities

	INDIA, 1990				NEPAL, 1989			
	Ages 6-9		Ages 10-14		Ages 6-9		Ages 10-14	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Work	3.0	1.9	5.4	4.0	3.2	1.7	7.7	4.4
Non-subsistence	0.7	0.6	2.3	2.9	0.3	0.3	1.8	1.3
Subsistence	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.4	2.0	1.2
Household	1.4	0.7	2.3	0.6	2.2	1.0	4.0	2.0
Reading/studying	0.4	2.5	0.2	1.1	2.1	4.8	3.8	0.3
Leisure	1.3	1.5	0.8	1.2	—	—	—	—

Source: Compiled by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat from national studies.





**Fourth World Conference
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Politics and Decision-making

Despite the widespread movement toward democratization in the past decade, women have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies, or achieving the target of 30% in decision-making levels set by the UN.

Women in government

- As of December 1994, only 24 women had been elected Heads of State or Government in this century, half after 1990. At the end of 1994, ten women headed Governments—a historically unprecedented figure.³
- On average, only 5.7% of cabinet ministers were women in 1994, an increase from 3.3% in 1987.³



- Between 1987 and 1994, the number of countries with no women in ministerial positions dropped from 93 to 59.³

- In six countries (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, the Seychelles and Sweden) about one third of the ministers are women.³

- After the 1994 election in Sweden, women increased from one third to parity with men (52%) in ministerial posts.³
- Women are better represented at sub-ministerial levels (posts such as vice-minister, permanent secretary and deputy secretary and director). 23 countries have at least 15% women at this level, compared with 14 in 1987.³
- Of the 25 countries with no women at either the ministerial or sub-ministerial level in 1994, more than half are in Asia and the Pacific.³
- Some fields of decision-making are more

receptive to women: in western Asia, while there are no women in political decision-making positions in Government, 3.9% of decision makers in social fields are women; and in northern Africa there are no women in economic decision-making, but there are 16.7% in law and justice.³

Women in parliament

- Women's progress in parliaments is mixed: women's membership has declined in East and West Asia, and dropped sharply in eastern Europe after 1987 but turned up in some countries in recent elections. It increased slightly in Africa and Latin America, and somewhat more in developed countries.³
- Women's strongest parliamentary representation is found in northern Europe, particularly the Nordic countries, and is rising steadily.³

Women make a difference

If women are represented in sufficiently large numbers in the decision-making arena (constituting a "critical mass" estimated at 30-35% in decision-making bodies), they have a visible impact on the style and content of political decisions.¹

- In some countries (including Austria, Argentina, Colombia, Germany, the Nordic countries and Poland) women are voting differently from men, and in close elections determining the outcome. In Norway, women in one set of municipal elections systematically voted for female candidates, increasing the proportion of women in municipal councils by 50%.¹
- Women have expressed a preference for political parties with female candidates, and those representing women's interests, especially reproductive rights, social support services and participation in decision-making.¹



Women in the UN — The first 50 years

- 4% of delegates to the UN General Assembly in 1949 were women. By 1994, 20% of the delegates were women. The highest proportion were from the Caribbean (29%) and Latin America and the developed regions (22-24%). Delegations with the fewest women were from Eastern Europe (5%) and southern Asia, western Asia, and Oceania (8-9%).³
- Beginning in 1985, the General Assembly set goals for increased women's participation. The current goal is to have 35% women in the Secretariat by 1995, with 25% at the higher management levels. At the end of 1993, the number of women in senior management was only 13%.³

Women and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

With the exclusion from traditional avenues of power, women have gained access to power through alternative structures, particularly the NGO sector. Women's NGOs articulate their interests and concerns and place women's issues on national, regional, and international agendas.

- Collaboration has greatly increased between governments and women's NGOs in the decision-making process. For example, women's NGOs, which lobbied at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, helped draft the Declaration on Violence Against Women, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1993. It is the first universal legal instrument aimed specifically at combating violence against women.

Promoting women's participation

- Political parties in some countries have adopted quota systems for women (Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Venezuela) that ensure a minimum representation of women (from 20-50%) in political bodies.¹
- In 1992, the United Republic of Tanzania passed a law requiring at least 15% of all members of parliament to be women.¹
- Bangladesh attributes the increase of women in civil service from 17% of officers in the Secretariat in 1987 to 25.7% in 1991 and the increase as officers in the Directorates from 7.1% in 1987 to 19.6% in 1991 to the introduction of quota systems.¹
- In Argentina, a quota for women was established in 1991, to guarantee a minimum 30% participation in political parties.¹

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- ▶ Take action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers.
- ▶ Monitor and evaluate progress on the representation of women at all levels in decision-making in the public and private sectors.
- ▶ Protect and promote the equal rights of women and men to political activities and freedom of association, including membership in political parties.



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Women and the Environment

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Sept. 1994) called for the participation of women on an equal basis with men in human development, economic growth, and environmental management to achieve lower population growth rates and sustainable development.³

Women, men and the earth

- Both women and men are involved in environmental degradation, often exploiting whatever natural resources they can to survive.³
- Consumption also has a great environmental impact: Industrialized countries, with barely 25% of the world's population, use 85% of all wood products consumed, 72% of steel production, and 75% of energy.¹⁹

**The urban environment**

Rapidly growing cities are plagued by industrial pollution, poor working conditions, vehicular pollution, limited and contaminated water supplies, and deficiencies in solid waste management and sanitation.²

- Air pollution: London produces 1,200 tons of pollutants every year, Los Angeles 3,400 tons, and Mexico City 5,000 tons. In Bangkok, more than 40% of the city's traffic police report suffering from respiratory problems.⁶
- The rate of miscarriages in two industrial cities in the Ukraine with high air pollution was found to be twice the rate in a clean air control city. The rate of congenital anomalies was three times the control rate.²⁸

- The urban poor often establish communities on hillsides, garbage dumps, swampy areas, and near sources of industrial pollution unsuitable for human settlements.²
- The percentage of urban women lacking access to sanitation services is estimated to be: Africa (20%), Asia (20%) and Latin America (14%).³

The rural environment

- 10-15% of the rural population of developing countries live in environmentally degraded or ecologically vulnerable areas.³
- Rural population pressure is greatest in Africa, where the overall rate of rural population increase is more than 2% per year.³
- Women in poor rural areas are disadvantaged in dealing with the environment when they have less education and training than urban women or rural men, and are excluded from traditional rural development programmes, credit, and other institutional support.³
- The median time spent collecting fuelwood by women in low deforestation areas is 0.5 hours, and it is at least 7 times that in highly deforested areas.³

Indoor pollution

Women in some developing countries spend much of their time cooking with bio-mass (wood, straw, or dung) in poorly ventilated areas, exposing them to high levels of indoor air pollution.³

- A study in Nepal found that women cook on average 5 hours a day, with indoor particulate concentrations in rural areas as high as 20,000 micrograms per cubic metre. As a result, acute respiratory infection and bronchitis are common. The WHO standard is 150-230 micrograms per cubic metre.³



Women manage the water

Throughout much of the South, women bear the primary responsibility for collecting, supplying, and managing water.²⁵

- The world's supply of water per capita is only one third of what it was in 1970.⁶
- The percentage of urban women lacking safe drinking water is: Africa (13-14%), Asia (13-14%), and Latin America (8%).³
- The percentage of rural women affected by water scarcity is: Africa (55%), Latin America (45%), and Asia (32%).³

Women and natural resource management

- In Ghana, a project initiated in 1988 works with women farmers to plant trees in woodlots, alley-cropping orchards, farms, and along streams. The project has improved soil fertility and should reduce the need for expensive fertilizer. The woodlots will allow women to spend less time and money obtaining fuelwood.²⁵
- In rural Indonesia, a group of women launched a community awareness programme, including a radio broadcast about sanitation and health. Attracting a large listening audience, many installed latrines and improved the quality of drinking water, leading to a reduction in waterborne diseases.²⁵
- In 1990, a group of Honduran women trained women and men about deforestation and soil erosion, building wood-conserving stoves, planting trees in deforested areas,

and building outdoor lined sinks. Erosion was cut in half, and water quality improved.²⁵

The hard costs

As a result of deforestation and increased restrictions on public use of forests, women's income from selling forest products has decreased, constraining women's economic opportunities.³

- The deterioration of Europe's forests from air pollution causes economic losses of US\$ 35 billion a year. The estimated annual loss of agricultural production due to air pollution is (in billions of US\$): Italy (1.8), Poland (2.7), and Germany (4.7).⁶
- Studies in Uttar Pradesh, India, found that nearly 50% of poor women's income comes from common land, compared with only one eighth for that of poor men.³

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Reduce risks to women from environmental hazards at home, work and other environments.
- Ensure that clean water is available and accessible to all by the year 2000.
- Create rural and urban training to disseminate environmentally sound technologies to women.
- Increase the proportion of women involved in programmes for natural resource management and environmental protection and conservation.

Much of a woman's work goes unrecognized

Time women spend collecting water in selected African countries
(hours/week)

Burkina Faso, Zimtenga Village	4.4	Kenya, villages	
Botswana, rural areas	5.5	Dry season	4.2
Côte D'Ivoire, rural	4.4	Wet season	2.2
Egypt	4.9	Nigeria, Oluwatedo Village	
Ghana, northern farms	4.5	Dry season	7-10.5
		Wet season	3.5-5.25

Source: The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics, United Nations, 1995.





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Violence against Women

Everywhere, and at all ages, women are victims of violence. In many countries one quarter to more than one half of women have been physically abused by a present or former partner.¹⁰

A global phenomenon

- Gender-based abuses are rarely reported. According to victimization surveys, only 2% of intramarital child sexual abuse, 6% of extra-marital sexual abuse, and 5-8% of adult sexual assault cases are reported to the police in the US.¹⁰
- In a study in Santiago, Chile, almost 75% of all assault-related injuries to women were caused by family members.¹⁰



- Of the murdered women in Canada in 1987, 62% died at the hands of an intimate partner.¹⁰

• Violence between intimates is often more injurious than street violence. In the US, more than 80% of all assaults committed by current or former spouses result in injuries, compared to 54% of assaults by strangers.¹⁰

- A three-month surveillance survey in Alexandria, Egypt, indicated that domestic violence was the leading cause of injury to women, accounting for 27.9% of all visits by women to area trauma units.¹⁰

Rape and sexual assault

- A 1993 study from Canada based on 420 women found that more than 54% of them had experienced some form of unwanted sexual assault before the age of 16.
- A random sample of 150 women in Trondheim, Norway, found 25% had been

physically or sexually abused by their male partners.¹⁰

- A support center for rape victims in Bangkok, Thailand, reported that 10% of its clients contract a sexually transmitted disease as a result of rape.¹⁰
- Throughout history, women have been subjected to rape as part of war: a European Community fact-finding team estimated that more than 20,000 women were raped in Bosnia in the first months of the war. Mass rape in recent years has been documented in Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia, and Uganda.¹⁰

Violence early in the life cycle

- A survey in Barbados revealed that one in three women was sexually abused during childhood or adolescence.¹⁰
- In Peru, a study at the Maternity Hospital in Lima found that 90% of mothers aged 12-16 years had been raped, often by a father, step-father, or other close relative.¹⁰
- Violence during pregnancy has been identified as a major reason for miscarriage and low-birth-weight children; in Costa Rica, 49% of a group of 80 battered women reported being beaten during pregnancy, 7.5% reporting miscarriages.¹⁰

Traditional practices

Female genital mutilation (FGM), a harmful traditional practice, can cause trauma, swelling, haemorrhage, obstruction of urine and menstrual flow, and risk of AIDS transmission. It can lead to life-long physical and psychological scars or serious injury and death.¹

- Each year an estimated 2 million girls suffer the practice of FGM in Africa and Asia, or as immigrants or refugees in Europe and North America.²⁹



- Dowry-related abuse is common in some countries. In India, official police records show that 4,835 women were killed in 1990 because their families did not meet the demands for money and goods by the fiancé's family.¹⁰

Emotional and psychological abuse

Those working with victims of domestic abuse report that women often consider psychological abuse and humiliation more devastating than physical assault.

- A study of 127 battered women in Ireland asked: "What was the worst aspect of the battering experience?" The top responses were: mental torture (30), living in fear and terror (27), physical violence (27), depression and loss of confidence (18), and effects on children (17).¹⁰

The hard costs

The World Bank has developed a way to estimate the economic impact of violence by counting every healthy year lost due to premature death as a Disability-Adjusted Life Year (DALY), with its value depending on the severity of the disability.

- According to World Bank DALY analysis, rape and domestic violence are significant causes

of disability and death among women of reproductive age worldwide.¹⁰

- In industrialized countries, gender-based victimization accounts for nearly one in five healthy years lost to women aged 15-44. The percentage is lower in developing countries due to the larger overall burden of disease.¹⁰

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- ▶ Take measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women.
- ▶ Enact and enforce legislation against perpetrators of practices and acts of violence against women.
- ▶ Train legal, medical, social, educational, police, and immigration personnel to ensure fair treatment of women victims of violence.
- ▶ Document incidents of all types of violence.
- ▶ Consider enacting legislation aimed at preventing sex-tourism and trafficking.



Source: Lori Heise, Pacific Institute for Women's Health, 1992





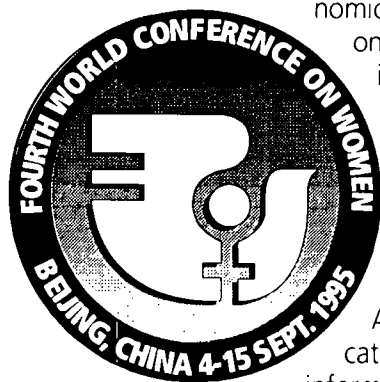
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Women in the Global Economy

Rapid influx of women into the paid labour force has been one of the greatest economic changes over the past decade. However, many of the jobs open to women are underpaid, poorly regulated and short-term.

Global trends

- Using international standards defining economic activity, the ILO counted 897 million women aged 15 and over as economically active in 1994.³ It is estimated that women will make up more than half the labour force in most countries by the year 2000.²
- The average ratio of women to men (number of women per 100 men) in the economically active population is on the rise: 37 in 1970, 52 in 1980, 62 in 1990.²
- About half of all economically active women in developing countries are in the informal sector. Studies of major cities in Latin America and Africa indicate that 25-40% of the informal workforce is female.²
- Over the past two decades, economic activity rates show increases for women in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa and eastern Asia, and all of the increases are large ones except in eastern Europe, central Asia and Oceania. By contrast, economic activity rates have declined for men everywhere except Central Asia.³



tions, there was a simultaneous downgrading of the occupations, pay, and status.³

- 75-80% of female workers in developed market economies are in the service sector, 5% in agriculture, and 15-20% in industry.²
- Most working women in developing countries are engaged in agriculture, sales, or service jobs, excepting the newly industrialized countries of South-East Asia, which have a growing number of women working in industry.²

The wage gap

While advances have been made in wage equity over the past 40 years, most women still earn 50-80% of men's wages.²

- Wage segregation is particularly marked in developing countries with export-led industrialization. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, women in Latin America earn on average 44-77% of men's wages.²
- The average wage of women working in manufacturing relative to men was, in 1990/91: 88% in Sri Lanka, 70% in Hong Kong, 56% in Singapore, 51% in Korea, and 43% in Japan.²
- Studies show that wage regulation systems can narrow gender differences in pay. A centralized process of wage determination with the intent of equal pay explains the high ratios in Italy. The even higher ratios in Nordic countries can be explained by centralized wage setting, a collective bargaining process, and a higher percentage of unionized workers (64-80%).³

Occupational segregation

- When women enter previously male occupations, the status of these occupations falls. A study in Europe found that in occupations where women were achieving high-level posi-

Women and economic decision-making

Though more women are working and being paid today, their number as economic decision-makers is still very low compared to men.

- Globally, women hold 10-30% of manage-



ment positions, and less than 5% of the very highest positions.²

- 1994 data indicate that in economic ministries including finance, trade, economy, and planning ministries and central banks, women constitute only 3.6% of the total positions. In 144 countries, there are no women at all in these areas and at these levels.²
- A 1993 study indicates that US companies have a slightly higher proportion of women managers (8 women for each 100 men) than non-US companies, which average one woman executive for each 100 male executives.²
- In the next generation of economic decision-makers, the pool of qualified professionals will contain increasingly large numbers of women. Globally, the ratio of women for each 100 men studying law and business at the third level has increased from 25 in 1970 to 102 in 1990.¹
- At the level of personal decision-making, many women enjoy working. An East German survey in 1991 found that only 10% of the women would definitely give up their jobs if they no longer needed the money.²

Getting even over time

Women's work is not well described by conventional data collection methods. Even within the international standard, housework is excluded from measurements of economic activity and production. One way to assess the different activities of women and men is through time use stud-

ies, capturing in sequence all activities over a fixed period of time, usually one or two days.³

- In most countries women work approximately twice the unpaid time men do — and in Japan, women work nine times as much.³
- Data covering three countries in Southern Asia indicate that women spend 3-5 more hours per week in unpaid subsistence work than men, carrying water and wood and growing and processing (primary agricultural products for their families), and an additional 20-30 hours more per week than men in unpaid housework.³
- UN estimates put the value of unpaid housework alone at between 10-35% of GDP worldwide.²

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay and for equal work of equal value.
- Amend laws to ensure that financial institutions provide services to men and women on an equal basis.
- Give rural women equal access to and control over resources, land, credit, property rights, development programmes, and cooperative structures.
- Eliminate discrimination in the workplace, especially on the basis of reproductive roles such as pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Women in management: slow progress

Ratio of women to men in administrative and management occupations by region, 1980 and 1990. Number of women per 100 men

Region	1980	1990
Africa	10	18
Asia and the Pacific	9	10
Eastern Europe	30	66
Latin America and the Caribbean	24	34
Western Europe and other	23	41
World	19	34

Source: Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, from data contained in the Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base (Wistat), version 3, 1994.





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Women's Health

The differences between women and men in their exposure to disease and their treatment stem from socio-economic and cultural factors that determine nutrition, lifestyles, and access to health services. This has led to a gap in preventive and curative services for diseases biologically tied to women.³

Life expectancy

- The average life expectancy is 79 years for women and 73 for men in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. By contrast, this figure for sub-Saharan Africa is 54 years for women and 51 for men.³



- Between 1970/1975 to 1990/1995, life expectancy increased for women and men almost everywhere. The greatest gains for women were in northern Africa, eastern, southern and western Asia and Central America (all by 10-11 years), while

the smallest gain was in Eastern Europe (2 years).³

Health risks and causes of death

- The leading causes of death from middle age to early old age are, in developed countries, cancer for women and heart disease for men.³
- While communicable diseases account for only 5-6% of deaths among women and men in developed regions, they account for about 70% of female and male deaths in sub-Saharan Africa.³
- Women are becoming increasingly affected by HIV. Worldwide, the cumulative number of infected women is expected to reach 15 million by the year 2000. By mid-1994, about 40% of estimated cases of HIV were women.

Maternal mortality

The health of women 15-45 years of age is predominantly influenced by their reproductive and maternal roles. Despite progress in a number of areas, the morbidity and mortality rates related to reproductive health remain unnecessarily high in many parts of the world.¹

- Each year more than 150 million women become pregnant. According to WHO, 23 million of them (more than 15%) develop complications requiring skilled treatment.³
- Approximately 500,000 women die every year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, or 1,500 each day.⁵
- Maternal mortality rates vary widely. An African woman's lifetime risk of dying from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth is 1 in 23, compared to 1 in 4,000 for women in North America.³
- Child survival influences the number of births a woman will have during her life. Improved child survival results from declining family size and better birth spacing. Women often cite poor infant survival chances as a reason for maintaining high fertility, and many studies confirm a positive association between fertility and infant and child mortality.³

Contraceptives and good health

Contraceptives enable women to limit and space the number of children they have, considerably improving the health of both women and children.³

- Levels of contraceptive use: eastern Asia (79%); other Asian and Pacific countries (42%); developed regions (72%); Latin America and the Caribbean (58%); Africa (18%).³
- Indicating an unmet need for contraception, among married women of reproductive age, from 1985-1989, many had more children than they desired: Peru (44%); Bolivia (42%); Egypt (37%); Tunisia (34%); Kenya (30%); Morocco (27%).³



- Concern about health complications is by far the most common reason why women stop using contraceptives — much more than lack of access, husband disapproval, social pressure, or religious beliefs.³

Reproductive health

- WHO estimates that globally 20 million unsafe abortions are performed every year, resulting in the deaths of 70,000 women.³
- The risk of death from an unsafe abortion is 100-500 times higher than if the same procedure were performed under safe conditions.³
- In developed regions, where abortion is most often legal, and safe health services are accessible, the risk of death from abortion is 1 in 3,700. In the developing regions it is on average 1 in 250.³
- Maternal mortality rates in central and eastern Europe, apart from Romania and Albania, are about twice as high as the European average. However, in Romania and Albania maternal mortality rates have fallen dramatically since the legalization of abortion.¹

Anemia and nutrition

- Globally, 43% of all women and 51% of pregnant women suffer from iron-deficiency anemia.¹
- Iron deficiency increases women's susceptibility to illness, pregnancy complications, and maternal deaths. It also reduces physical productivity and the capacity to work and learn.^{3,5}
- India, with an estimated 88% of pregnant women suffering from anemia,⁴ is one of the very few countries which have taken national action to eliminate iron-deficiency anemia. 1994 reports indicate that over 70% of Indian women are now being reached with at least 3 months' worth of ferrous tablets during pregnancy.⁵
- Malnutrition in girls is responsible for problems in childbirth, such as obstructed labour, fistulae, and birth asphyxia.¹

Access to health facilities

- Prenatal care has been increasingly included in primary health services, and is widespread in southern Africa, Eastern Asia, and the Caribbean (about 90% of women covered) and in Latin America (70%). But the coverage remains very low in South Asia (35%), a region which also has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality.³
- 59% of women in developing countries receive prenatal care, compared to 98% of women in industrialized countries.⁸
- 55% of births in developing countries are attended by trained health personnel, compared to 99% in industrialized countries.⁸

Ageing women

- The number of women aged over 65 years will increase from 330 million in 1990 to 600 million by 2015.¹
- Of these elderly women, many will suffer from chronic diseases associated with ageing, such as osteoporosis and dementia, and the diseases of neglect, such as malnutrition, alienation, and loneliness.¹

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- ▶ Provide women with access to affordable, high-quality primary health care.
- ▶ Eliminate harmful or coercive medical interventions and inform women of their options in medical treatment.
- ▶ Close the gender gap in morbidity and mortality and reduce infant and child mortality.
- ▶ Enact legislation to alleviate and eliminate environmental and occupational health hazards.



**Fourth World Conference
on Women**

4-15 September 1995

Beijing, China

Action for Equality,
Development and Peace

Literacy and Education

Education is a basic human right which is essential for achieving the goals of equality, development, and peace. Educated women tend to raise healthier families, have fewer children, and be more productive in both the home and the workplace. Children of educated mothers are more likely to become educated too.

Global literacy

- According to UNESCO, literacy has risen in all regions of the world, but 885 million women and men, almost a quarter of the world's adult population, are still estimated to be illiterate. Sixty-four per cent of the illiterate are women.

Literacy gaps

Women in rural areas often have high illiteracy rates, in some countries two to three times that of women in urban areas.

- In Honduras, in 1988, of women aged 15-24, 9% in urban areas and 30% in rural areas were illiterate.³
- Generations of educational neglect have left high illiteracy rates, especially for older women in developing countries. Illiteracy rates among women 25 and above are typically two or more times those of women aged 15 and 24.³
- Among women over 45 years of age, illiteracy rates in developing countries were usually at least 50% in the late 1980s, and often exceeded 70% in Africa and Asia.³

Primary school

- Girls' primary-school enrolment has reached parity with boys' except in Africa and Asia. In 1990, the average ratios of girls to each 100

boys in primary school was: Africa (79); Asia and the Pacific (84); Latin America and the Caribbean (95); western Europe and other (95); eastern Europe (96).¹

College and university

- Women are increasingly entering colleges and universities. In 1990, the average ratios of women to each 100 men in tertiary education was: in Africa (32); Asia and the Pacific (84); western Europe and other (94); eastern Europe (104); and Latin America and the Caribbean (106).¹
- Increases have been dramatic in some countries: China's number of female postgraduates increased by 157% from 1985-1992.¹
- An increasing number of girls are entering fields once dominated by men. The average ratio of females to each 100 males in science and technology were, in 1990: Latin America and the Caribbean (80); Eastern Europe (74); Asia and the Pacific (70); Western Europe and other (67); and Africa (24).¹

Non-formal education

- As many children fall through the education net, non-formal education programmes become essential, especially for girls. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has created 4,500 experimental schools since its start in 1985. Out of the 100,000 children served by BRAC, 70% are girls from rural landless families.¹

Economic crisis hits education

The progressive trends in education adopted by many countries were reversed in the 1980s, particularly among those experiencing problems of war, economic adjustment and declining international assistance in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and a few other cases.³



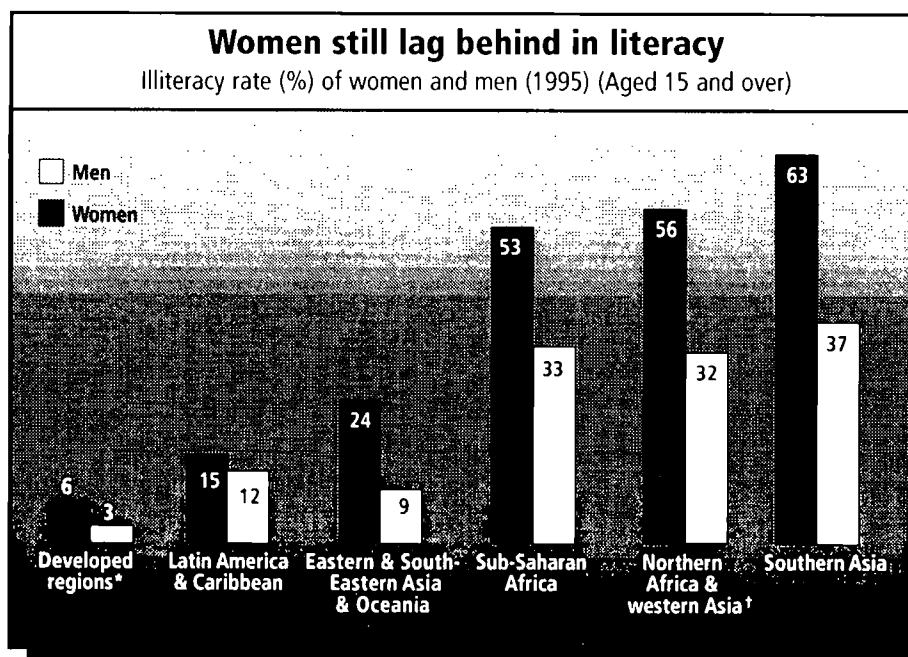
- An increase in per capita gross domestic product tends to improve female schooling and literacy. However, remarkable success can be found even in areas with low GDPs, suggesting policy can be more influential than the economy. In 1991, the per capita GDP in the Indian state of Kerala was below the country's average per capita GDP (Kerala: US\$ 200, India: US\$ 250), but the percentage of literate women in 1991 was 87% in Kerala compared to 34% for India countrywide.⁵

Population growth

- In many countries with rapid population growth, the planning of new educational facilities has not met the actual need. In Nigeria, the number of primary schools increased by 85% between 1975-76 and 1982-83, while the number of students increased by 140%.¹

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Eradicate illiteracy among women worldwide.
- Ensure the completion of primary education by at least 80% of children, with special emphasis on girls, by the year 2000.
- Create an educational system that ensures equal education and training opportunities.
- Develop curricula, textbooks and teaching aids free from sex-stereotypes for all levels of education.



* Approximations † Also includes Djibouti, Mauritania and Somalia Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Statistics on adult illiteracy, Preliminary results of the 1994 estimates and projections" (STE-16).





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Women and Poverty

To be poor is to be deprived of the means to meet basic survival needs. Women, because of their lower status, are more likely to fall into the crushing cycle of poverty.

Poverty on the rise

- From 1985-1993, the number of people living below the poverty line (the equivalent of US \$370 a year, according to the World Bank) increased by 20%, from 1 to 1.2 billion.²
- Over 70% of the people now living in absolute poverty are women, reports UNDP's Human Development Report 1995.³³
- The increase in poverty is paradoxical, given the strong global economic performance from 1980-1989:

The average annual rate of economic growth during this period was 3.2%, compared to 2.4% from 1965-1980.²

- The gap between rich and poor has increased: From 1960-1991, the share of the world's income for the richest fifth of the world rose from 70% to 85%, while the share of income for the poorest fifth dropped from 2.3% to 1.4%.⁶

- In 1993, the world faced increasing famine: 800 million starving people and 34,000 children dying each day from need of food and medical supplies.²

Regional trends

From 1985-1990, the poor as a percentage of the total population remained high, and increased in a few regions: ¹ Sub-Saharan Africa (from 47.6% to 49.7%); Middle East and North Africa (from 30.6% to 33.1%); Latin America and the Caribbean (from 22.4% to 25.5%).

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, almost 50% of the population live in absolute poverty, surviving on less than US\$1 a day.⁸
- Poverty has surged in the transition economies of eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States; from 1989-1992, the percentage of the population living in poverty rose in Poland from 20.5% to 42.5% and in the Russian Federation from 27.1% to 77.1%.¹
- In the European Community at the beginning of the 1990s, 44 million people (or 18% of the population) were estimated to be living in poverty, with 10 million living in extreme poverty.²
- In the US, 33.6 million people (13% of the population) were estimated to be living below the poverty line in the 1980s.¹
- By the end of the 1980s, approximately 75% of all poverty in the US was concentrated among women, particularly single mothers and older African-American women. In the US, the number of families headed by poor women is rising by about 100,000 a year.¹

Female-headed households

The strong correlation between female headship and poverty results from the high dependency of children on mothers, inadequate remittances from absent men, and gender differentials in access to resources and productive employment.²

- Female headship varies by region and within countries. The highest proportions are found in the Caribbean (35%). Rates average between 20-24% in the majority of other regions (developed: 24%; Latin America: 21%; Sub-Saharan Africa: 20%; South-East Asia and Oceania: 17-18%); northern Africa, western Asia, and southern Asia: 12-13%.³
- In 44 out of 66 studies by the International Research Center for Women, from 1979-



1989, female-headed households were poorer than their male counterparts.²

- In Norway, 13% of all households headed by women are below the poverty level, compared to 5% of those headed by men.¹
- There is evidence that women heads of household provide their children with better nutrition and education than men heads of household.³

Urban poverty

Urban populations are growing at a rate two and a half times that of rural populations. At this rate the UN projects that more than half of the world's population will be urban by 2005, transferring the burden of poverty from rural to urban areas.²

- The urban population of developing countries is overwhelmingly young, which has an indirect impact on women in terms of domestic burdens, overcrowded housing, and a greater demand for child-care facilities and schools. In Africa, 41% of the urban population is under 15 years of age, and in Asia and Latin America, 30% is under 15 years.²

Women and land

Poverty among rural women is linked to issues of access and control of productive resources: land, labour, capital, technology, and extension services.²

- Although many developing countries have legally affirmed a woman's right to own land,

it is rare. Land titles in most countries are registered in the name of the male head of household, and women do not secure land tenure. Without the title to land, women lack the collateral needed to obtain credit.²

- Review of projects over the past decade reveals that technology can sometimes have negative effects on women: In Asia, some 375 million landless female labourers' seasonal menial work of weeding, hoeing, and milling is threatened by increased mechanization.¹¹
- Although women represent 80% of the food producers in some countries, only 5% of extension organizations' time and resources are allocated to women, and only 13% of extension workers are women.²

The Draft Platform for Action proposes to:

- Provide adequate social safety nets, and strengthen State- and community-based support systems.
- Formulate and implement specific economic, agricultural, and related policies in support of female-headed households.
- Revise laws and practices that limit disadvantaged women's access to ownership of land, credit, inheritance, natural resources, and appropriate technologies.

Burden of poverty falls on women

Female-headed households by region (%), 1980-1990

Region	1980	1990
Africa	20.6	18.2
Asia and the Pacific	14.9	17.2
Eastern Europe	23.1	—
Latin America	27.6	20.8
Western Europe	23.7	31.2

Source: Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Secretariat, from data contained in Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base (Wistat), version 3, 1994.

