

INDIA

The accumulated effects of inequality



Discrimination against women from or even before birth guarantees them a marginal role in Indian society, and ensures that they are poorer, less educated, and facing more unemployment and health risks than men. The cumulative effects of these inequalities worsen deprivation but the opposite is also true and by addressing inequality a positive multiplier effect can reduce poverty.

Social Watch India

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Targeting gender inequality for the eradication of poverty has been proposed and reiterated in various forms and at various forums. The Millennium Development Goals include eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015. India's Tenth Five Year Plan includes the national development goal of reducing the gender gap in literacy and wage rates by at least 50% by 2007.² This paper looks at the present poverty and gender situation in India.

The *Beijing Betrayed* report by the Women's Empowerment and Development Organization (WEDO) presented at the Beijing+10 UN Conference mentioned "growing poverty [as a] powerful trend ... harming millions of women worldwide".³ In India the majority of the approximately 260.3 million people living below poverty line⁴ are women. Poverty was aggravated after economic reforms introduced the country to the forces of globalization in a way that women's labour was casualized and limits were placed on production entitlements on natural resources.

Poverty indicators have expanded as the concept of poverty has broadened. Along with consumption, income, capabilities, and entitlements, the concept of poverty now includes vulnerability, insecurity and defencelessness in the face of crisis. An interesting aspect of women's poverty is how the causes of its multiple manifestations are interrelated. Policy initiatives must be sensitive to the centrality of this issue because of the "substantial linkages between the women's agency and social achievements" and poverty's multidimensional nature.

India's sex ratio (the number of females per 1,000 males in the population) is a demographic indicator which is cause for concern. According to the 1991 Census there were only 927 women for every 1,000 men. If both sexes were treated equally the ratio esti-

mated for India would be 105 women to every 100 men. As Amartya Sen pointed out, with a population of 1 billion, there ought to be 512 million women in the country but instead the female population was estimated at only 489 million, which implies that there are 25 million "missing women". These missing women are either discriminated against before birth so that they are never born, or discriminated against once alive but in such a way that does not allow them to survive.⁵ Analysts note the "sex ratio divide between the northwestern and southeastern regions" with the latter being friendlier to women. Developed regions such as Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi, and developed enclaves within these regions such as New Delhi, have more unfavourable sex ratios. In fact, gender inequality tends to intensify with development and globalization.

Labour market rigidities were removed and labour flexibility policy was introduced in the shift towards market regulation. The policy's emphasis on flexibilization policies, its response to market uncertainties, and efforts to reduce costs meant a reduction in the core workforce "relying on increasingly irregular forms of employment [and the] casual nature of the work contract".⁶ Many of the areas affected by the policy were relevant to the "characteristics associated with women's historical pattern of labour force participation".⁷ Also, "shifting industries and Employment Centres led to replacement of socially constrained and therefore less mobile women workers".⁸

Gender inequality and poverty

The disparate yet interlinked nature of gender inequalities has been dealt with in detail by Amartya Sen,⁹ who looked into inequalities in mortality, birth rate,

basic services, opportunities, professional life, ownership, and households. These are not only interlinked but they also contribute to women's poverty.

The different kinds of inequalities are serious impediments to opening up individual capabilities and choices. Their cumulative effect worsens economic deprivation, which in turn reinforces other kinds of hardships. Positive developments in certain areas likewise have a multiplier effect. Literacy, for example, has a positive impact on nutrition levels, medical care and employment opportunities.

Women and health

Female mortality is higher among infants where "every sixth infant death is specifically due to sex discrimination"¹⁰ and among girls under 5 years of age where the rate is 18% higher than among boys. Estimates indicate, that "of the 15 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25% will not live to see their 15th birthday."¹¹ The infant mortality rate is not always positively correlated with development. In the state of Haryana, which has a fairly high per capita income, the "infant mortality rate... is 68 per 1,000 live births, four times higher than the state of Kerala".¹² Sex-selective abortion is a mechanism of discrimination even before a female child is born, facilitated by technology which determines a child's sex during pregnancy. Additionally, chronic energy deficiency is found in almost 40% of adult females. In the cities of Calcutta, Hyderabad and New Delhi, the percentage of anaemic women is 95%, 67% and 73% respectively.¹³ With the unavailability of accessible maternity facilities in most areas of the country, "300 Indian women die every day during childbirth or of pregnancy-related causes."¹⁴

There is pronounced discrimination against females regarding the availability of health and education facilities. A study in the Punjab region showed that family medical expenditure for boys was 2.3

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2 UNDP India. "India Human Development Goals." www.undp.org.in/ihdg.htm

3 WEDO. *Beijing Betrayed. Women Worldwide Report that Governments Have Failed to Turn the Platform into Action*, New York, 2005.

4 Kundu, Swati Lodh. "Poverty of reforms in India". 4 March 2005. www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GC04Df07.html

5 "Women in India. How Free? How Equal?" Report Commissioned by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in India, 2001.

6 Majumdar, Indrani. *Emergent Contradictions: Globalization and Women Workers in India*. New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, May 2004.

7 United Nations. *1999 Survey of Women, Globalization Women and Work*, 2000.

8 Majumdar, Indrani, *op cit*.

9 Sen, Amartya. "Many Faces of Gender Inequality", in *The Frontline*, 9 November 2001.

10 Coonrod, Carol. "Chronic Hunger and the Status of Women in India." June 1998; www.thp.org/reports/india/wom.htm

11 *Ibid*.

12 Ministry of Finance, Government of India. "Economic Survey 2003/2004". <http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2003-04/chapt2004/tab91.pdf>

13 Coonrod, Carol, *op cit*.

14 Mohan, Raman. "Tales that 'missing women' tell". 4 August 2002; www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020804/herworld.htm#1

times higher than for girls. Maternal mortality rates are higher, especially in rural areas. "The estimates nationwide are that only 40-50% of women receive any antenatal care... Pregnancy-related deaths account for one-quarter of all fatalities among women aged 15 to 29."¹⁵

Education

The situation is no better in education. The literacy rate for women is 45% compared to 68% for men.¹⁶ Of the 130 million 6 to 11 year-old children not in school, 60% are girls. Only 59% of primary school students reach grade five.¹⁷ Also, only 39% of females (compared to 64% of males) above the age of 7 are literate.¹⁸ Literacy has been found to be "a much better predictor of many indicators of family welfare like child mortality." The exclusion of women is even greater at higher levels of education and professional training. Women who ultimately end up in higher level professions inevitably hit a glass ceiling and remain at lower or intermediate levels of the hierarchy.

Unemployment and underemployment rates are higher among women than among men. The same is true of educated women. Among tertiary education graduates "the rate of unemployment was less than 9% for men but 27% for women". Lower literacy rates have resulted in fewer women in employment categories which require higher educational and professional training. Overall, female participation rate in the labour force is 32%,¹⁹ with variations between states. The states of Tamil Nadu Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra show much "higher rates of work participation than the major northern and eastern states".²⁰ Nationally, women only make up 18% of the formal sector and only 9.2% of employed women hold full-time positions, compared to 18% of employed men.

Wage differentials between male and female workers are found in every sector and have widened since the 1990s. Women are mostly employed in agriculture and the informal sector. They comprise 32% of the informal sector workforce including agriculture and 20% of the informal non-agricultural sector.²¹ "In the non-agricultural sector women are more likely to be self-employed or casual workers". The share of casual wage labourers of the total number of employed women is 42.5%.

15 *Ibid.*

16 World Bank. Genderstats; <http://genderstats.worldbank.org/home.asp>

17 UNICEF. *Panorama: India*. 2001; www.unicef.org/spanish/infobycountry/india_india_statistics.html

18 Coonrod, Carol, *op cit.*

19 World Bank, *op cit.*

20 Ghosh, Jayati. "Globalization and Women in India: Some Macro Conclusions", Paper presented at Seminar on Globalization and the Women's Movement in India, CWDS, New Delhi, 2005.

21 Unni, Jeemol and Uma Rani, 2003, www.india-seminar.com/2003/531/531%20jeemol%20unni%20%20%20uma%20rani.htm

In urban areas a "significant proportion of women workers are employed in the unorganized sectors such as household industries, petty trade and services and construction activities."²² Women are also employed in large numbers in "invisible work" such as home-based work, subcontracted household work which makes up 49% of home-based work, or outwork and street vending.²³ Jobs in the informal sector are mostly without stable contracts or incomes. In fact women's share of informal employment declined during the liberalization decade. "It came down from 21.5% in 1993-94 to 19.9% in 1999-2000."²⁴ At the same time the wage gap between men and women has increased among lower wage earners. Most of these workers are self-employed or casual workers, with women placed in more vulnerable situations.

Women are also marginalized because they are powerless in different economic, social and political activities. Legal provisions and social practices regarding ownership and inheritance are weighted against women, except in a few areas where matrilineal family structures exist. Social, political and family structures do not include women in decision-making. This not only affects the place of women in society, the economy and the family, but also contributes to their low self-esteem. Women's empowerment, in terms of "capacitating women to understand, tackle and overcome gender oppression", is a process which requires economic, social and political steps, all taken in a coordinated manner. This needs to be emphasized because different forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and their remedies have similar interconnections. Some policy aspects and development processes are also interconnected, such as improvements in literacy rates, which in turn improve nutrition, family education, and professional choices.

Government policies

Women's development became a central issue after the report of the Committee on Status of Women in India (1974) and the emphasis it received in the 5th Five Year Plan.²⁵ The National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) and the National Plan for Action for Empowerment of Women from the 10th Five Year Plan outline strategies for social and economic empowerment and gender justice. The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level was launched in 2004 to provide special emphasis within the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan programme by giving additional support to girls' education at that level.

Women in rural areas from families living below the poverty line were the target group of the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas programme which started as a pilot project in

22 Ministry of Finance, Government of India, *op cit.*

23 Unni, Jeemol and Uma Rani, *op cit.*

24 Majumdar, Indrani, *op cit.*

25 Planning Commission, Government of India. Fifth Five Year Plan.

1982. The programme aimed to give poor women access to employment, skills training, credit and other support services. Women's groups were formed to combine services such as family welfare, childcare, nutrition, education, childcare, safe drinking water, and sanitation. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, in operation since 1989, is aimed at "the generation of additional gainful employment"²⁶ by providing a means of livelihood for people who are at critical levels of subsistence. Reviews of this programme's work conclude however that "the share of women in employment generated was poor and there were differentials in wages paid to male and female workers".²⁷

Government programmes, although rich in ideas and covering different aspects of empowerment, suffer from many problems which are common to other government-run initiatives. One such problem is budgetary allocations. Often it is a case of "too little, too late" which leads to a backlog in work coverage and budgetary deficits. As regards the 2005-2006 Budget, it is argued that in order to tackle the problems of employment generation, direct public intervention is needed. "The government's own estimates are that such a scheme would cost at least Rs 25,000 crore²⁸ [USD 5.7 billion] per year, while other estimates go up to around Rs 45,000 crore [USD 10.3 billion] per year. [However] in the current budget, the proposed allocation for Food for Work programme is only Rs 5,400 crore [USD 1.2 billion], a relatively small increase of Rs 3,582 crore [USD 818.9 million], while the allocation for the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana²⁹ has actually been cut by Rs 990 crore [USD 226.3 million]. This suggests that even the piffling amount set aside for Employment Guarantee Act is at the cost of other employment programmes, rather than in addition to them."³⁰

There is also the perennial problem of implementation. Development, instead of being treated as an initiative, is treated as a government routine. The government programmes also suffer because of their high cost of implementation which leaves fewer resources for development at ground level. Financial allocation for these programmes is made by the central Government but must be carried out by the states. The political will and administrative effectiveness of the state governments often differ from the "central design" of the programmes. The successful implementation of these programmes is affected by the haphazard dynamics of federal polity.

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26 *Ibid.*, Ninth Five Year Plan.

27 Chelliah, Raja J. and R. Sudarshan, Eds. *Income Poverty and Beyond: Human Development in India*. New Delhi: Social Science Press, 1999.

28 Editor's note: A crore equals 10 million rupees.

29 This programme aims at providing wage employment and food security in rural areas along with creation of durable community, social and economic assets.

30 Ghosh, Jayati. "Budget 2005: Reality Check", in *Frontline*, 20 March 2005.

BOLIVIA

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In spite of not being explicitly stated, the demands made by social movements point the way to substantial changes in the reforms implemented since 1985. The different conflicts the country has gone through in the last five years show that Bolivian society and its social organizations have set themselves challenges:

- To recover ownership of hydrocarbons in general and of gas in particular. Bolivian society demands a new state and regulatory framework in which the exploration, exploitation and ownership of deposits, the privileges, taxes and opportunities of industrialization are defined by the authority of Bolivian people, in terms of their national interests.
- To change international trade rules to allow the State to provide new conditions for national production. National industries and small producers should be protected to afford a more inclusive vision and development, which will not subject equity to the protection of foreign investments and to the interests of national companies linked to international trade, thus promoting the overexploitation of labour.
- To implement State reform, expressed in the demand for a Constituent Assembly, which would modify the state's structure in order to include the participation of representatives from ethnic and regional groups and challenge the socio-economic basis of the political system as well as the legitimacy of representative democracy. In other words, a reform that would seek the true participation of workers, rural and indigenous organizations, as well as the use of productive resources and a system of social protection that will allow changes in people's material living conditions.
- To de-commodify basic services. The intention is to cancel contracts that privatized water and sewage services and subjected an essential service to the profitability of multinational companies.
- To cancel the external debt. The State's fiscal feasibility requires the total cancellation of external debt. Until now, ineffective relief mechanisms have proved insufficient to achieve macroeconomic balance and reduce poverty.
- To implement tax reform. The current system only requires minimum contributions from transnational companies and high-income sectors of the population.

The fulfilment of these objectives would draw Bolivia closer to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals. ■

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Several social organizations. *Manifiesto de las organizaciones e instituciones de la sociedad civil frente al próximo Grupo Consultivo para Bolivia*, La Paz, 2005. www.wemos.nl/Documents/cg-bolivian-manifiesto-march-2005.pdf

CANADA

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Missing in action: National unity of purpose

For the first time in 25 years, Canadians are governed by a minority federal government,¹⁶ and the possibility of progressive social policy has been catapulted again onto centre stage.

At the same moment, the very *raison-d'être* of the Canadian federation is being challenged by political representation that is regionally divided. There is no national party that can win seats in all parts of the country, when not so long ago there were two. Canada has been wracked by regional static: Quebec separatism,¹⁷ Western alienation,¹⁸ Ontario's new what's-in-it-for-me attitude. Each provincial protest has resulted in more federal cash for the jurisdiction in question.

National programs have been jeopardized. After more than a decade of bitter disputes between federal and provincial authorities, the federal Government increased cash transfers to the provinces for health care and childcare but it has been reluctant to specify the terms and conditions of the new cash. The federal Government is turning into a head waiter to the provincial demands of the day. Each province has different views on how to address social needs. But virtually all provinces want to deliver balanced budgets and tax cuts. Over the past decade, all provinces have reduced tax rates and reigned in the growth of spending just like the federal Government. Taken together, provincial and federal governments offered USD 205 billion in tax cuts between 1996 and 2004. In contrast, USD 88.5 billion went to new health expenditures, the single greatest social priority for Canadian citizens.¹⁹

There is, however, some hope. Current political dynamics have shifted the balance towards more spending. While staying within its self-prescribed 12%-of-the-economy limit, the latest federal budget was relatively heavier in spending than past budgets, including a USD 4.1 billion package for childcare. Budgetary amendments ultimately reallocate some elements of the original plan - notably deferring some corporate tax cuts - to add another USD 3.8 billion over two years for housing, infrastructure, student assistance, the environment and international assistance.

What impact will this have on Canadians living in different parts of the country? Housing, childcare,

tuition fees are controlled by the provinces, which see the balance between markets and public provisions in these domains quite differently. The only nationally consistent rhetoric around improving access to basic needs is to shorten waiting times for health care. Even this objective is unfolding through a range of public initiatives and public-private sector deals. Will the new money improve access for all?

Without a coherent vision based on key human rights objectives, Canada may collapse into a loose collection of balanced budget states. The devolution of responsibility for public provisions has made it difficult for Canada to set and meet key national priorities. Until we unite in our purpose, it will be difficult to gain ground on the big ideas of our time - the reduction of poverty and inequality, at home and around the world. ■

INDIA

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Women in politics

In the field of political empowerment we find that while there is indeed a revival at the grassroots level, the representation of women is still very minor at higher levels of decision-making. Despite all the economic and social structural hurdles, some organized and unorganized women's groups are taking initiatives in political and social fields.

The 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 have proven to be a major step towards the political empowerment of women. By these amendments one-third of positions in local institutions at all levels are reserved for women.³¹

The Panchayati Raj³² institutions have become effective vehicles for the political empowerment of women by broadening women's leadership and giving them statutory powers of decision-making at local levels. "Women head about 175 District Panchayats,³³ more than 2,000 Block Panchayats and about 85,000 Gram Panchayats".³⁴ Some states, such as Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, have more

16 On 28 June 2004 Paul Martin's Liberal Party won a minority government - a government in which the ruling party has not elected more members than all other parties and Independents combined - with 135 seats in the House of Commons.

17 The Quebec nationalist movement which has led to 2 provincial referendums on the region's sovereignty.

18 The sentiment in Canada's western provinces that the federal Government does not properly address their concerns.

19 Armine Yalnizyan, *Can We Afford to Sustain Medicare?* Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, July 2004, p. 8.

31 Statement by the Hon Dr Murlidhar Joshi Minister for Human Resource Development at *Women 2000: Gender Equity, Development and Peace for the Twenty First Century*, 5 June 2000.

32 The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992 introduced the concept of Panchayati Raj - that villagers should think, decide and act for their own socioeconomic interests. It is a form of village self-governance.

33 A *panchayat* is a council. Each state in India is divided into districts, each district into blocks and each block into *grams*, and councils exist at each level.

34 Kumar, Shradha and Sanjay Upadhyaya, "Grassroots Democracy: Local Governance Watch", 28 December 2004; www.socialwatchindia.com



women members than the statutory 33% of all seats. Again, “the Southern states are faring better in promoting leadership compared to Northern States.”³⁵ In some states there are all-female Panchayats doing commendable work, especially in the field of primary education. However there are serious impediments to women leaders’ work due to illiteracy, patriarchal traditions and restrictions resulting from the social structure. Some of the problems emanate from the reluctance and lack of confidence of governmental officials at higher levels. Fiscal decentralization is the most commonly experienced problem faced by Panchayats.

The new Panchayati Raj institutions have brought women into local governance institutions but political empowerment is unable to flourish because of male-dominated political process, institutions, social structures and norms.

At higher institutional and decision-making levels women’s representation remains extremely limited. A recent ranking of countries according to the percentage of women in national parliament placed India 93rd on the list of 185 countries.³⁶ In the *Lok Sabha* (House of the People) there are only 45 women out of 543 parliamentarians, approximately 8.3%. Out of a total of 242 *Rajya sabha* (Council of States) members, only 28 are women, a mere 11.6%.

Conclusions

In spite of definite improvements in the status of women since independence, the picture remains bleak. This is especially true with respect to poverty, employment, health care and education. Social and political empowerment has indeed taken place but in the absence of complementary economic empowerment, women remain impoverished and excluded. Development agencies advocate the “creation of an enabling legal, social and economic environment (as of utmost importance) for achieving poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment goals”.³⁷ ■

35 *Ibid.*

36 Inter Parliamentary Union. “Women in National Parliaments”. 28 February 2005.

37 United Nations. “Poverty in a Globalizing World at Different Stages of Women’s Life Cycle”, 19 November 2001.

KAZAKHSTAN

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Gender inequality is one of the structural socio-cultural causes hampering development in Kazakhstan. This inequality stems from the legacy of past historic periods along with factors such as a traditional culture with weak democratic values,

paternalistic relations in society, peculiarities of economic activity, dependence on mining industries, weak infrastructure, regional disparities, and unsustainable use of environmental resources. These causes lead to insufficient participation of women in different sectors of society, their exposure to various risks, and a growth in discrimination and sexism.¹⁰

Kazakhstan has the potential to achieve gender equality by 2015. The issue now is how this potential will be developed and used, how deep the institutional and cultural changes in the society will go, and whether new threats to equality might arise. ■

10 *Kazakhstan: Achievement, Issues and Prospects. A Perspective by the United Nations*. 2004, p. 50.

LEBANON

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Conclusion

Lebanon is still far from completing its commitments to the CEDAW due to the large number of violations of women’s rights, both in law and in practice. Even the legal amendments made to reduce gender bias need monitoring mechanisms to ensure their proper implementation. Reducing poverty and poverty feminization are not yet a priority for the Government.

This absence of governmental will combined with an infrastructure which does not cater to women’s needs and rights, assigns non-governmental organizations (NGOs) a major role in this respect. NGOs have made significant efforts in the enforcement of international conventions in Lebanon. The national action plan focused on women’s empowerment through services and activities provided by NGOs, such as private and micro-credit, education, and training.

Although the NGO sector was responsible for much of the progress made in this field, its work remains controversial. In general, the work of NGOs is a micro-effort focused on specific communities. Many NGOs are religious institutions and provide welfare in the form of charity to the mothers, daughters or sisters of men on religious grounds and not as women in their own right. Also due to the large number of NGOs in Lebanon, their efforts are scattered and often overlap. This is compounded by the fact that the priorities of many NGOs are imposed by their funding institutions and are therefore not based on prevailing needs.

Welfare and charity are simply not enough to create sustainable change. Structural changes are required which no actor can undertake alone. The State, which is the only legislator and guarantor

of responsibilities and rights, must provide a suitable environment so that the private sector, civil society organizations, the media, and men and women, can realize their share of responsibility and create incentives that will enable women to change the reality around them and to actively claim their rights as equal human beings. ■

NETHERLANDS

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Conclusion

In order to achieve the MDGs by 2015 we must learn from the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. The UN MDG Review Summit is the arena for deciding on the relevant issues which have cropped up during other world conferences. The Netherlands is a key player in the preparation phase of the MDG Review Summit and therefore CSOs call on the Government to become a true leader. The emphasis must lie on the following:

- The seven strategies on gender must be incorporated. CSOs demand that these strategies also be integrated into Dutch policies, including those on development cooperation.
- In education world leaders should focus more on countries where girls do not go to school and on situations in which girls are restrained from attending school due to child labour and HIV/AIDS, for example.
- HIV/AIDS has created an unprecedented situation, which needs a strong response. Socially sensitive subjects related to the disease must be openly discussed.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be incorporated into MDG 5 as a new target.
- World leaders should counteract neoconservative forces which promote the ABC Approach and resist abortion, thus hindering the success of MDG 5.
- There are still inadequate funds available to meet the MDGs and therefore the many countries who do not yet meet the set goal of 0.7% ODA should do so as soon as possible. ■