

Women and Globalisation: Is Microcredit the Answer?

Pam RAJPUT

Professor, Political Science and
Director, Centre for Women's Studies and Development
Panjab University, Chandigarh, India
Email: pam@pu.ac.in

Abstract

The focus of the present paper is upon the impact of globalisation upon women worldwide, with special reference to India and the viability of micro credit as a panacea to the fall out of globalisation. Will global economic integration support reduction of gender inequalities and disparities? Is providing micro credit to women the answer to the drawbacks of globalisation? Does it in reality make them "economic actors with power"? These are the key questions, which the present paper seeks to address. It is argued that women have suffered disproportionately from globalisation, while seeing few of its benefits. This is particularly true of India. It is, indeed, paradoxical that on the one hand, all out efforts are being made for women's empowerment, while on other, women are being disempowered through globalisation.

Lack of access to credit is a key barrier to economic development and growth in the informal sector in which women constitute an overwhelming majority. This has led to an increasing emphasis upon micro credit and microfinance for women as means for their empowerment. The present paper seeks to provide a feminist critique of micro credit, and to question the entire paradigm and strategy of development. It is argued that the proponents of this approach are merely glossing over its contradictions. There is need to go beyond its limited range and scope, reinterpreting its objectives and methodologies in the light of the feminist framework of development and empowerment, to meet the challenges offered by globalisation and enable women to avail of the opportunities it offers as real actors in the whole process.

"Micro credit is a critical anti-poverty tool—a wise investment in human capital, when the poorest, especially women, receive credit, they become economic actors with power. Power to improve not only their own lives, but in a widening circle of impact, the lives of their families, their communities and their nations..."

Kofi Annan
Secretary General, United Nations.

Women, worldwide, continue to suffer from pervasive gender discrimination, subordination and inequality. The nature and extent of such discrimination and subordination may vary across countries and regions, yet no region of the world, be it developed or developing can claim absolute equality for men and women in every aspect of social, economic and political life (See Annexure I). Witness the fol-

lowing:

- Women constitute 70% of the world's poor.
- The consequences of their poverty are visible in lack of nutrition and nutrition related disorders, ill health, and inability to access health services.
- Female mortality rates, particularly maternal mortality rates continue to be high, especially in the developing world.
- Women continue to be denied access to and control of resources.
- They remain deprived of political power and say in decision-making.
- They continue to dominate the ranks of the illiterate, with low enrolment and high dropout rates.
- Violence against women, both inside and outside the home, is spiralling upward. Their so-called protectors turn into the violators of a woman's physical and mental integrity.

The costs of these pervasive inequalities, although impinging directly on women and girls, ultimately cut across society, harming all - males, females and children alike. Promoting gender equality becomes not only desirable, but also absolutely essential to create a world free of poverty and disease¹.

Will global economic integration support reduction of gender inequalities and disparities? Is providing micro credit to women, the answer to the drawbacks of globalisation? Asserting that providing women with credit makes them "economic actors with power" (Kofi Annan) are high-sounding words, but does micro credit in reality empower women and the disadvantaged? These are the key questions, which the present paper seeks to address. Accordingly, the focus is upon the impact of globalisation upon women worldwide, with special reference to India and the viability of micro credit as a panacea to the fall out of globalisation.

What is Globalisation?

Globalisation is the persistent, pervasive, over-used and under-defined buzzword of the new millennium. It implies a free market, profit and growth oriented economy. Its manifestations vary from the larger flows of trade, services, foreign investment, reduction of poverty (in some countries), faster communication and transportation, technology development and transfer, as well as joint global efforts to resolve problems of discrimination, subjugation, poverty, disease and the like where people cutting across countries and regions express solidarity and a joint concern on matters affecting humanity, to an increase in international crime and terrorism (witness the September 11 terrorist attacks on WTC), the global spread of HIV/AIDS, conflicts and instability.

Globalisation, as a phenomenon, is nothing new. Since times immemorial, globalisation has been witnessed through various phenomena such as travel, trade, migration, transfer of science and technology, socio-cultural influences etc, all of which have served in one way or the other to make the world a smaller, close-knit place. However, it was primarily in the seventies of the last century that the process of global economic integration gained momentum. The debt crisis of the eighties prompted many developing countries to adopt what are known as structural adjustment policies, which imposed conditionalities on the debtor countries, failing which they could not qualify for loans from the IMF and the World Bank. These conditionalities, as Pam Rajput and Hem Lata Swarup observe, "read like a ready-made blueprint for promotion of a market-friendly, growth-oriented model; reduction of fiscal deficit for economic stabilisation; export promotion for BoP containment; devaluation to sell more in developed countries; import liberalisation; cut in social services; liberalisation of domestic regulations and dismantling

of public sector infrastructure”². This process gained further momentum with the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the 1990s. This was also the time when most South Asian nations entered the fray and opened up their economies to the world trading system. For most countries of the South, globalisation has come through Structural Adjustment Policies imposed by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF), who prescribe the conditionalities primarily liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation, free trade, opening up the economies to multinational companies for investment; the entire process, which is market-oriented, is expected to foster growth and development.

Globalisation has its proponents as well as critics, with the former extolling its virtues for human development. It is extolled for raising economic growth, increasing access to markets, reducing poverty and inequality, increasing productivity and consequently standard of living. Its proponents contend that it permits optimum utilisation of resources.³

However, it lacks growth with justice and leads to greater impoverishment and disempowerment of vulnerable sections, especially women and children. It has not only led to an increase in overall poverty and particularly to feminisation of poverty, but also created a great divide by pitting the interests of the corporate economy against the fundamental human rights of the vast millions of the people. It is a travesty of the human civilization that the development of science and technology-nuclear, space and communication-which should have made this globe of ours one extended family has actually transformed it into a pyramid with its top, middle and bottom billions. The dichotomised categories of man-woman; West-East; North-South; rich-poor; endowed-disinherited; and dominant-dependant have fragmented humanity itself. And the irony is, that is all in the name of GLOBALISATION.⁴

The high population growth rates, high levels of illiteracy, poor health, pervasive poverty and inequitable distribution of income and assets that marked South Asia prior to globalisation continued despite it. As a matter of fact, poverty has grown in absolute terms. Increasing inequality, heightening income differentials have become the order of the day. The neoliberal policies of the corporate economy and the market fundamentalism, characteristic of globalisation have increased the misery and insecurity of the bottom billions, while lining the pockets of the top few. Having only profit as their God, the multinational conglomerates, the most visible facet of globalisation are destroying the rights and the livelihoods of peoples in the two-thirds world.

Globalisation is equally indicted by the Human Development Report of South Asia for “focussing on integrating markets without improving the condition of the vast majority of South Asians. As a result, income inequalities have widened, the number of people in poverty has gone up during the period of globalisation, and human development levels, though improved since 1960, have started to stagnate or decline. The poor are being increasingly marginalised. Some ethnic groups are virtually faced with a complete exclusion from the benefits of globalisation.”⁵ The Report reveals a decline in growth rates, sluggish growth of income and employment in the industrial sector although it notes that there was an improvement in life expectancy and literacy rates⁶ and emphasizes that “the nature of social and economic development in all the countries of the region had not been sufficient to reduce poverty or to make any meaningful difference in the lives of the majority of the population.”⁷

In the global movement against neoliberal globalisation, voices of dissent are now emerging from amongst the common people. In an unprecedented move, women from across the world protested against globalisation in Beijing in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Such protests are now becoming more frequent and vociferous, witness a large public protest against free trade at the time of the Third Ministerial Conference of WTO in Seattle in December 1999, so much so that the protestors

had to be dispelled using tear gas.⁸ The World Social Forum held annually in Porto Alegre (Brazil) at the same time as the World Economic Forum in Davos (Switzerland), has emerged as another important site of confrontation with the forces of globalisation. As the debate goes on, regarding the alternate models of development and themes like 'Another World is Possible', it does not seem feasible in the near future to reverse the forces of globalisation. As Nicholas Stern very rightly points out, "it is pointless to think that the integrative forces can be reversed; the challenge is to make the most of them while mitigating the risks."⁹

Women and Globalisation

What has been the impact of globalisation upon women? This issue has attracted immense attention of scholars and academics the world over, with some emphasising the beneficial aspects of globalisation and insisting that women have generally benefited from improvements in the world economy¹⁰, while others stress upon its overall negative impact,¹¹ which includes, but is not limited to a denial of entitlements as well as a violation of women's human rights. Central to a realization of the human rights of women is an understanding that women do not experience discrimination and other forms of human rights violations solely on the grounds of gender, but discrimination arises from the intersectionality of race, caste, class, national origin **and** gender.

Globalisation, no doubt, has offered tremendous opportunities¹² for overall development, but at the same time, it has negative aspects, which far outweigh the positive. For the purpose of the present paper, it would suffice to highlight a few areas of impact of globalisation on women. It, for one thing, seeks to bring about fiscal austerity through cuts in social sector spending. Cuts in public spending on health, education and social services have increased the burden of women, because of transference of the welfare functions of the state onto the family, particularly the women, who constitute the primary caregivers the world over, caring for the children, the aged, the handicapped and the sick as well as provisioning the household with the basic necessities of water, fuel, fodder, food and clothing; an abdication of the role of the state. Cuts in public expenditure on education imply increasing costs on education, which further imply a higher rate of dropout of girl-children from educational institutions. Cuts in budgetary support to the health sector, equally result in fall in real terms of expenditure on health care. The first major casualty is the infrastructure development in the rural health sector.

Take another case, that of food security. As women bear a major burden of providing food within a family, any reduction in food availability places an unequal burden upon them, for their intake is the first to be slashed. Moreover, they have to bear an additional burden of looking for additional income to supplement the meagre resources of the family, apart from having to spend more time and energy in acquiring cheaper food.

Increasing opportunities for women's work are being created mainly in the informal/unorganised sector with little or no formal social protection. A growing number of women work in precarious casual, contractual and part time work and other non-standard forms of employment 'at any price and under any conditions'. Witness the condition of women in the Export Processing Zones, where they work from 'morn to night' in conditions reminiscent of the 19th century, not the 21st century¹³. Women who work in these zones accept wages much lower than the male industrial workers in the lowest rung. Further, the wage structure in the units is designed to increase work intensity to the maximum with scarce basic pay on which workers get allowances related to productivity, overtime etc. This forces the workers to

increase working hours in order to merely survive. What is worse is that no labour laws are in force in these zones, making working conditions absolutely dismal. The upshot of the entire process is a weakening of the nation state, which, giving in to international pressure, abdicates its responsibility of protecting the rights of its citizens, in order to provide a conducive environment for multinational corporations to invest in the country.

Introduction of new technology is also increasingly marginalizing women in economic activities, with men getting more opportunities of acquiring new skills of which women remain bereft. This combined with the lower levels of education and skill training amongst women has the added impact of leaving women at the lower rungs of the labour market and in jobs that require less formal training or education. The replacement of manual labour with machines and new technology leads to greater retrenchment in the case of women as they usually have a wider education gap to cover as compared to men in order to acquire the skills of utilising such new technology. These trends are not adequately captured by official statistics. This is partly due to the lack of clear definition of the informal sector. Furthermore, the activities undertaken in the informal sector also often remain hidden, particularly those undertaken by women within the household or on the streets. The invisibility of women and workers in this sector leads to them being ignored in urban development plans and policies which are hostile to the informal sector anyway.

The rising economic cost is complemented by an equally high social cost, one, by the frustrations, tensions and job insecurity, encountered by women themselves as a result of casualisation of labour, secondly, the escalating violence upon women due to the psychological impact of the contradiction between the fantastic visions of *El Dorado* shown through satellite television and the reality of increasing poverty.

Another devastating fallout of globalisation has been the increase in migration and trafficking of women. The developing countries have been encouraged by the international bodies to develop their tourism and entertainment industries; the development of sex trade has been an allied consequence and has been bestowed legitimacy. Women and children have become the new raw resource for export to be sold to the sex industry. The displacement, substitution of traditional means of livelihood with modern ones, the consequent unemployment, which follow in the wake of globalisation, leave women with little alternative, except to use their bodies as a resource to survive. This crisis is particularly visible in tribal and socially marginalized communities, resulting in a large number of women of these communities reaching the sex industry via trafficking. Trafficking of women and girls for prostitution has increased with globalisation, with 500,000 women a year trafficked out of countries in Eastern Europe and CIS. In Asia about 250,000 people, mostly women and children, are estimated to be trafficked every year.¹⁴ Statistics reveal that worldwide two women get infected by HIV every minute, which is indeed a horrendous reality and a major cost of the entire process.¹⁵

The adverse impact of globalisation upon women's livelihood, employment, education, health, etc have been highlighted by numerous national and international reports.¹⁶ Majority of these reports point out the increase in violence against women; deterioration of the health system; increase in female headed households as men lose jobs or are pushed out of their traditional income-generating roles; shrinking of resources available to women; increasing women's total labour hours, etc. "Growth can, and has become for many, jobless, voiceless, rootless and futureless," poignantly states the UNDP Human Development Report of 1996.

The Declaration adopted at the recently held NGO Forum, World Conference Against Racism, Racial

Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, August 27-September 1, 2001 indicts globalisation for its adverse impact upon women, declaring unequivocally, “Globalisation including structural adjustment policies, privatisation, trade liberalisation and unequal terms of trade create new and exacerbate already existing conditions of exclusion of all individuals and communities, particularly women, who are the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance... It widens economic inequalities within and between countries, further impoverishing and marginalizing masses of peoples, and places them at risk to the demand for cheap and informal labour in labour-importing countries. Tools of globalisation such as structural adjustment policies result in poverty, famine and the collapse of health and educational systems. Globalisation leads to economic and social disintegration, unemployment and marginalisation. It particularly implies both feminisation and racialisation of poverty.”¹⁷

The 1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development equally notes that:

- “Women have been incorporated into paid employment in greater numbers in the past two decades, but usually under conditions inferior to those for men.
- Costs of economic adjustment have been borne disproportionately by women, especially poor women.
- The welfare demands placed on the family and women appear to have increased, especially in developing countries because of a reduction in social sector expenditures.”¹⁸

The Report continues “It is difficult to make broad generalizations about globalization especially in terms of whether its overall impact on gender equality has been positive or negative. Forces unleashed by globalization have given rise to new opportunities that can potentially be empowering to women, on the one hand, and economic conditions which are inimical to gender equality, including increased economic volatility, job insecurity and loss of livelihood, on the other hand.”¹⁹

The Jubilee 2000 campaign also emphasised that the human rights should “not be subordinated to money rights. Poor countries prepared to commit resources to meeting the basic needs and economic rights of their population should not be prevented from doing so because of the need to pay back debts to rich creditor countries and institutions.”²⁰

Women and Globalisation in India

Undoubtedly, globalisation with its accompanying Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) cannot be viewed as a gender neutral process, for the accompanying spread of market ideologies and consumerism have led to increasing feminisation of poverty, casualisation of labour, increase in violence against women as well as their commodification among other things.

Globalisation has recast gender relations and altered the status and life condition of women. More women work outside the home in the wage labour force. While this has undermined traditional patriarchy, it has burdened women with a double load of work, exposed them to harshly exploitative conditions in the paid work place, and scarcely improved their material well-being. Women have suffered disproportionately from globalisation, while seeing few of its benefits; their interests get lost somewhere in the jungle of globalisation.

This is particularly true of India. For instance, SAP has led to the dismantling of the Public Distribution System in India, which has adversely impacted expenditure on food, which constitutes more than half of the total monthly expenditure of the average Indian family.²¹ It bears repeating here

that lack of food not only increases the economic burden of women who have to go out to find resources necessary to purchase food, but they are the ones who eating last in family, get the least. A look at the Table below reveals that expenditure on food in India continues to constitute at least 59.41% of the total expenditure in rural areas in 1999-2000, although it has declined from 63.18 % in 1993-94. The corresponding proportion in urban areas is lower at a little under 50% of total expenditure. Higher the expenditure on food, higher the burden upon women.

Table 1 Composition of Per Capita Consumption Expenditure in India (in per cent)

	1983		1993-94		1999-2000	
	Food	Non-Food	Food	Non-Food	Food	Non-Food
Rural	65.56	34.44	63.18	36.82	59.41	40.59
Urban	58.69	41.31	54.65	45.35	48.06	51.94

Source: National Human Development Report, 2001 Planning Commission, Govt. of India, March 2002, pp. 151, 152

Women's problems are compounded by scarcity of water in general and safe drinking water in particular. Numerous studies reveal that women spend at least 2 hours per day in fetching and carrying water for the household from distant places, sometimes miles away. 'Miss Universe' may want coke and Miss World cry out for Pepsi, but an overwhelming majority of Indian women only cry out for safe drinking water. In a country where a large proportion of the population lives below the poverty line, emphasis on Coke, Pepsi and bottled water seems more like saying "if they don't have bread, let them eat cake." To the multinational corporations this seems to make for a favourable climate for investment, a market worth Rs 48 crores (About 10 million USD), in bottled water. M.S.Swaminathan once said in lighter vein, "If men had to fetch and carry water, the water problem would have been solved long ago." How true, he was. Scarcity of safe drinking water has its corollary in the outbreak of numerous water borne diseases. India, studies reveal, loses 73 million workdays due to water related sickness every year. Diarrhoea is one of the major health problems associated with contaminated water supplies, and it is estimated that worldwide 3-5 million children die annually of diarrhoea. The outbreak of cholera and typhoid (both water borne diseases) in the year 2002, in the Union Territory of Chandigarh, which is also the capital of Punjab and Haryana, both highly prosperous states, is merely a trailer of the picture in India's interior.

This apart, globalisation has immediate ramifications on women's health. Firstly, there is a growing trend of privatisation of public health services and the introduction of user-fee services for treatment and medicine despite the fact that a major part of India lacks even primary healthcare services, with suitable and clean facilities, and with adequate medical supplies. The removal of price controls on pharmaceuticals and the opening of domestic markets to multinational corporations under globalisation have added to healthcare burdens. Spiralling costs of even everyday medicines are a growing barrier to healthcare. The increased cost of medical care is the second most common cause of rural indebtedness. The prohibitive cost of health care results in women placing their health needs at the bottom of the scale in household priorities, seeking medical care too late or not at all. The upshot of the entire process is increase in maternal mortality, incidence of communicable diseases including Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and AIDS, anaemia among women²², and curbing of life within the womb (female foeticide).

The assertions of the votaries of globalisation notwithstanding, the employment growth rate in India

has declined in the nineties as compared to the eighties. The two tables below reveal a decline in the growth rate of employment as well as an increase in the incidence of unemployment. Table 2 reveals the employment growth rate to have been 2.1% between 1983 and 1993-94, which declined to 1.6% between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, a decline of 0.5%. The corresponding decline in the case of females is much higher at 0.8%, from 1.7% to 0.9%. It is significant to note that the rate of growth of employment for women declined at a faster rate in urban areas as compared to rural areas.

Table 2 Growth in Employment in India (in per cent)

	1983 to 1993-94			1993-94 to 1999-2000		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
Combined	2.2	1.7	2.1	1.9	0.9	1.6
Rural	2.0	1.5	1.8	1.6	0.8	1.3
Urban	2.8	3.2	2.9	2.6	1.5	2.4

Source: National Human Development Report, 2001 Planning Commission, Govt.of India, March 2002, pp 158-160.

Corresponding with this decline in the growth rate, the incidence of unemployment too has increased. Table 3 below shows the incidence of unemployment (combined) for all persons increased by 0.3% between 1983 and 1999-2000. The corresponding increase for males was from 2.3% to 2.5%, but for females, it was higher at 0.5%, increasing from 1.3% in 1983 to 1.8% in 1999-2000. Significantly, the incidence of unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. It is noteworthy that the incidence of female unemployment in urban areas increased between 1983 and 1993-94 and declined thereafter. As against this, the incidence of male unemployment declined between 1983 and 1993-94 and increased thereafter. In rural areas, however, the incidence of unemployment of both males and females increased over this entire time period.

Table 3 Incidence of Unemployment in India (in per cent)

	1983			1993-94			1999-2000		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
Combined	2.3	1.3	2.0	2.1	1.7	2.0	2.5	1.8	2.3
Rural	1.4	0.7	1.1	1.5	0.8	1.2	1.7	1.1	1.5
Urban	5.0	5.2	5.1	4.1	6.6	4.6	4.5	5.9	4.8

Source: National Human Development Report, 2001 Planning Commission, Govt.of India, March 2002, pp.161-163

A parallel development may be witnessed in the increase in the percentage of women as marginal workers, particularly in the rural areas. Undoubtedly, the Census of India, 2001 reveals an increase in the workforce participation rates for women from 22.3% in 1991 to 25.7% in 2001. But, these statistics hide the fact that the percentage of women main workers²³ has come down from 16.0% to 14.7% in this period, while that of marginal workers²⁴ has increased by almost 5% from 6.2% to 11.0%. An areawise analysis reveals this trend to be more prevalent in the rural areas than in the urban areas. In the urban areas, as would be seen from Table 4 below, there is an increase in women main workers accompanied by a corresponding increase in the percentage of women marginal workers.

Table 4 Work Participation Rates in India

Total/ Rural/ Urban	Persons/ Males/ Females	Percentage to Total Population								
		Workers								
		Total Workers			Main Workers			Marginal Workers		
		1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Total	Persons	36.7	37.5	39.3	33.5	34.1	30.5	3.2	3.3	8.7
	Males	52.6	51.6	51.9	51.6	51.0	45.3	1.0	0.6	6.6
	Females	19.7	22.3	25.7	14.1	16.0	14.7	5.6	6.2	11.0
Rural	Persons	38.8	40.0	42.0	34.8	35.8	31.0	4.0	4.3	10.9
	Males	53.8	52.6	52.4	52.6	51.8	44.5	1.2	0.7	7.9
	Females	23.1	26.8	31.0	16.1	18.7	16.8	7.0	8.0	14.2
Urban	Persons	30.0	30.2	32.2	29.2	29.5	29.3	0.8	0.7	2.9
	Males	49.1	48.9	50.8	48.5	48.6	47.5	0.5	0.4	3.4
	Females	8.3	9.2	11.8	7.3	8.1	9.1	1.0	1.0	2.4

Source: Census of India, 2001, Series 4, Punjab, Provisional Population Totals, Paper 3 of 2001, p.40.

The marginalisation of women in economic activities has the added impact of pushing an increasing number of women into the informal or casual sector, which is characterized by low productivity, minimal incomes, and a lack of economic and social security, and lack of enforcement of labour laws. For instance use of new technology in agricultural production has shifted women into operations which are unrecorded and unlisted as economic activity, being counted in home based production, leading to a greater invisibility of women's work. Not only are an increasing number of women pushed into the informal sector, but even in this sector they are to be found at the lower end of the scale with very few in entrepreneurial positions. Most women are involved in various kinds of low-income activity, in casual or seasonal work, often of an unskilled and physically demanding nature, with low productivity, long hours and little opportunity for upward mobility. The actual extent of their work in this sector becomes extremely difficult to gauge because many of them help in carrying out activities of the production process which are not counted as work at all, like bringing the clay and water for pottery, or pre-processing the yarn for textile production.

Here it would be pertinent to point out that while the Census of India reports an increase in the female workforce participation rates in general as well as areawise, the Human Development Report of South Asia, 2001 reveals a substantial decline in work participation rates for rural women in India. Evidently, male workforce participation rates have shown minor fluctuations over this period. The female workforce participation rates, on the other hand, reveals a declining trend with higher work participation rates in the 1970's to the mid-eighties and a considerable decline thereafter.

Table 5. Work Participation Rates for Rural Men and Women in India (in per cent)

Year	Male	Female
1972-73	54.5	31.8
1977-78	55.2	33.1
1987-88	53.9	32.3
1989-90	54.8	31.9
1990-91	55.3	29.2
1993-94	55.3	32.8
1994-95	56	31.7
1995-96	55.1	29.5
1997	55	29.1
1998	53.9	26.3

Source: Various Numbers of Sarvekshana (a Journal of the National Sample Survey Organisation), as cited in Human Development in South Asia, 2001, p.74

Not only have rural women's work participation rates declined, but the unpaid work burden of women in agricultural sector has actually increased.²⁵ Shift in control of forestland, export driven production, consequent fluctuations in world market prices, free trade in agricultural goods, lifting restrictions on imports, encouraging switching over from production of food grains from domestic consumption to commercial crops for export such as fruits, vegetables and flowers, cuts in public expenditure on agriculture such as on irrigation, infrastructure development, and research, cuts in subsidies, particularly on fertilisers and power, permitting sale or leasing of land to commercial houses, marketing of seeds treated with terminator technology²⁶, retrenchment due to increased mechanisation and the consequent use of female labour to cut costs and increase profits have all negatively impacted the agriculture based population in India and led to an increase in the unpaid work burden of women and girls. Consequently, there has been increase in migration of the work force; feminisation of the rural work force; women have lost access to the local markets for their products and are dislocated from traditional forms of livelihood.

One interesting corollary of globalisation and its consequent commodification of women may be seen in the immense increase in the number of fashion shows, sponsored by conglomerates.

The impact of globalisation, then, is not limited to the economic field, but extends over the entire life cycle of women. It has accentuated the existing disparities and discriminations against women. It is, indeed, paradoxical that on the one hand, all out efforts are being made for women's empowerment²⁷, while on the other, women are being disempowered through globalisation. Noteworthy is the fact that the South Asian region is fast emerging as one of the most deprived regions of the world, with the largest number of people living in absolute poverty, of whom 60% are women.²⁸ As Jeanne Vickers very pithily observes, "When we speak of the 'poorest of the poor', we are almost always speaking about women. Poor men in the developing world have even poorer wives and children. And there is no doubt that recession, the debt crisis and structural adjustment policies have placed the heaviest burden on poor women, who earn less, own less and control less."²⁹ That global poverty is increasingly assuming centre-stage and its resolution a major issue of concern at both national and international levels, is revealed by the fact that the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly included among

other things halving poverty and hunger by the year 2015; promoting gender equality and empowering women as well as developing a global partnership for development.

Micro Credit: The Panacea?

It is being increasingly realised that improving women's economic opportunities and increasing their income levels results in greater economic efficiency, improved child health and nutrition and reduced poverty. However, the fact of the matter is that women have always been denied access to and control over resources, which inhibits their economic empowerment. Recognition of the fact that lack of access to credit is a key barrier to economic development and growth in the informal sector in which women constitute an overwhelming majority has led to an increasing emphasis upon micro credit and microfinance³⁰ for women as means for their empowerment. The rationale behind the micro credit theory lies in recognition of the fact that the traditional development paradigm has failed to 'develop' the poorest of the poor, majority of whom are women. Micro credit assumes a proportional relationship between women's poverty and lack of economic resources such as right to land ownership and inheritance. It aims at providing access to financial instruments for persons hitherto excluded from the conventional, formal financial system. It reduces economic dependency; makes women more aware of their rights, hence assertive, and increases women's control over material resources. Micro credit, in short, provides credit to the poverty stricken, at rates which may be higher than conventional bank rates, but considerably lower than those charged by moneylenders, with or without any collateral (which the poor usually can ill-afford) to encourage small scale entrepreneurship. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh was the "semi-nal" effort, which has been replicated across the world.

The impact has been such that various international instruments, recognising the significance of micro credit, appeal to Governments to improve women's access to credit. The UN General Assembly³¹ has noted that, in many countries micro credit programmes have proved to be an effective tool in freeing people from poverty and have helped to increase their participation in the economic and political processes of society.

The World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in March 1994 equally emphasised the importance of improving access to credit for small rural or urban producers, landless farmers and other people with low or no income, with special attention to the needs of women and disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Governments were called upon to review national- legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks that restrict the access of people living in poverty, especially women, to credit on reasonable terms; to promoting realistic targets for access to affordable credit, providing incentives for improving access to and strengthening the capacity of organized credit systems to deliver credit and related services to people living in poverty and vulnerable groups; and to expanding financial networks, building on existing networks, promoting attractive opportunities for savings and ensuring equitable access to credit at the local level.

The First World Micro Credit Summit, held in Washington in 1997, declared as its goal the launching of a global movement to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, particularly the women of those families, and provide them with micro credit facilities by the year 2005. The Beijing +5 Outcome Document³² equally recognized micro credit as a "successful strategy for economic empowerment" and for having "widened economic opportunities for some women living in poverty, particularly in rural areas." Micro credit has also come to the centre of the World Bank's strategy for poverty alleviation and

it has set a target of reaching 100 million of the world's poorest people with micro credit by 2005.

The strategy adopted in micro credit is to organise Self-Help Groups of 15-20 persons (usually in multiples of five) in a neighbourhood. The major focus is on women. The persons comprising such Self-Help Groups meet regularly to save and circulate their savings as loans on low interest rates, among group members. The peer pressure exerted by the group and the local context of its operation usually ensures prompt repayment of loans.

The provision of small amounts of credit, without collateral, and on easy terms, helps poor women to break their dependence on middlemen, facilitates the small enterprises run by poor women to swim in rough waters, and enables them to tide over emergencies such as ill-health, school fees, etc.

Micro Credit in India

In India, micro credit, minus the name, has existed for long, in the form of 'thrift and credit societies'. In recent times small Self Help Groups (SHGs) formed by some local persons coming together, maybe under the aegis of some NGO's have started mobilising savings of their members and lending these resources among the members on a micro-scale. The potential of these SHGs to develop as local financial intermediaries to reach the poor has gained recognition due to their community based participatory approach and sustainable-recovery rates which have been significantly higher than those achieved by commercial banks inspite of loans going to poor, unorganised individuals without security and collateral.

Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women in India have been recognized as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas: bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights. There are more than 35,000 Self Help Groups in India. Since the overall empowerment of women is crucially dependent on economic empowerment, women through these SHGs work on a range of issues such as health, nutrition, agriculture, forestry, etc. besides income generation activities and seeking micro credit. These self help groups have also become vital in the implementation of all major Governmental programmes. Apart from this, the SHGs have helped to fight social problems such as sale of illicit liquor, domestic violence. Appropriation of community resources by the powerful as well as petitioned for facilities such as electricity, water, etc.³³

Some distinct models of micro credit in India can be identified. In the first place, the Government of India has launched a number of schemes for providing micro credit. Various national schemes have been initiated which include Rashtriya Mahila Kosh³⁴, Rural Women's Development and Empowerment Project³⁵, Indira Mahila Yojana, Swaranjyanti Swarozgar Yojana³⁶, Swayamsidha³⁷, which see women's self help groups as vehicles for their empowerment. The Government equally facilitates access to technology and marketing initiatives.

The State Governments have launched their own programmes for instance, the Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission, called 'Kudumbashree (meaning prosperity for the family) which is implemented with the support of the Central Government and institutions such as NABARD and UNICEF. In Andhra Pradesh, the macro policy of the state has attempted to address through micro credit multifarious issues which plague the poverty stricken, such as access to safe drinking water, sanitation, health, livelihood etc.

Secondly micro credit schemes are supported by the banking system, with a lead being given by NABARD. A scheme, linking the SHGs with banks was launched under the aegis of National Bank for

Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) to augment the resources of micro finance institutions. All the major categories of banks, i.e., commercial banks, cooperative banks and regional rural banks are participating in the delivery of micro finance services. The synergy between banks, NGOs and Government working in the field of micro finance enabled the banking system to provide micro credit to 4.5 million very poor households as on March 2001 as compared to 1.9 million households as on March 2000.³⁸

The importance attached to micro credit by the banking system is highlighted by the fact that a Micro finance Development Fund was set up by the banking system in the year 2000. Apart from this the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) set up a Micro Credit Special Cell in April 1999, to suggest measures for augmenting the flow of credit, which submitted its report in January 2000. Earlier, NABARD appointed a Task Force on Supportive Policy and Regulatory Framework for Micro Credit, in November 1998. Since April 2000 these two reports have guided the shaping of policy initiatives on micro credit.

Thirdly, micro credit is facilitated by NGO's either with support from national schemes such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Indira Mahila Yojana, other poverty alleviation programmes or from Banks including NABARD, or through their linkages with bilateral and multilateral donors including the UN agencies and the World Bank.

Mention may be made of a few success stories in the field of micro credit in India. One of the most significant and noteworthy examples in the field of micro credit is the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which has been working since the 1970s. Its first micro-loan was given in 1975; \$ 1.50 to a woman to buy spices, which she could sell for a profit and look after her baby in her absence. It went on to establish the SEWA Bank, which is recognised alongwith the Grameen Bank as a pioneer in the field of micro credit.

Initiated with a modest 800 poor women from the slums of Madras in 1978, Working Women's Forum has grown into a union of 5,67,653 women in three southern States of India (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), which is nothing short of phenomenal. The remarkable aspect is that the definition of membership is based on the direct participation of the poor women in every aspect of the Forum's approach.

Another worth citing example is that of Mann Deshi Mahila Sahakari Bank Ltd (Mahila Bank) in Mhaswad, Satara District, in the Indian State of Maharashtra. Women have not only opened 'secret' bank accounts here, but the loans provided by this bank enable women to conduct business, acquire property rights, break traditional barriers of caste and patriarchy and play key roles in the village life. The Mahila Bank has more than 2,000 members with a share holding of Rs 24 lakhs (About 50,000 USD) and a loan recovery rate of 98%.³⁹

The Dhan Foundation in Gujarat has also started a number of 'kalanjams' in rural Gujarat. These Kalanjams were converted into a Federation in 1993 called the Vaigai Vattara Kalanjiam (Federation of Vaigai Area Kalanjams). The loans even went as high as Rs 50,000(about 1,000USD). Its success inspired the Tata Group of Industries to donate Rs 26 lakhs (About 54,000 USD) to build a Centre office, to start more kalanjams and address health issues. Today the Vaigai Vattara Kalanjiam Centre, at Appan Tirupathi, is abuzz with activity. It runs training courses for emerging kalanjams and watches over existing ones. It is the voice that speaks to the outer world. There are 4000 members in 246 kalanjams spread over 88 villages that lie under 46 panchayats⁴⁰.

Some other noteworthy initiatives in the field of micro credit in India include the Kheda District Women's Saving and Credit Program, which is the coordinating body for 307 Self-Help Groups with

10,010 members; Society for Helping and Awakening Rural Poor Through Education (SHARE), which was established in November 1992 and now serves approximately 40,000 borrowers in the Southern Indian State of Andhra Pradesh; Activists for Social Alternatives (ASA) became a micro finance institution in 1993, has about 9,000 active clients and functions in Tamil Nadu; Grameen Bank Uttar Pradesh (GBUP) has about 6,000 members and functions in Uttar Pradesh, home to more than 75 million poor households; the Tamil Nadu Science Forum, which has mobilized more than 10,000 women in 550 savings groups in the district of Kanya Kumari.

A special mention may be made of a self help group formed by dalit⁴¹ women, the Pooja Swayam Sahayata Samooh (Pooja Self Help Group). This group was formed in Village Bandh, Block Israna, District Panipat of the Indian State of Haryana in October 2001. Comprising of 10 dalit women members, the group was provided a revolving fund by the DRDA(District Rural Development Authority) and the Punjab National Bank, under the SGSY Scheme, of Rs 10,000 (207 USD) and Rs 15,000 respectively. The group showed its inclination to take Panchayat (Shamlat) land on lease for cultivation. As the project was unique in nature and a milestone for the empowerment of women in the National Year for Empowerment of Women, the proposal was accepted and the District Administration made an all-out effort to help the group get the land. The group managed to get the land (about 2-2.5 acres) under open auction at the rate of Rs 13,500 (280 USD) for the period of one year. The group planned to sow jowar and wheat, which together would have fetched them about Rs 15, 000 (310 USD) in savings. The project, thus, seemed to be viable. Talking to the women, the present researcher found them to be highly enthusiastic and confident of their success. However, the group faced problems of irrigation. The delay in rains cost them high, in that the period of sowing jowar was almost over and they could now only expect something from the wheat crop. The village people see this group as a new beginning for women, but were found to be sceptical about the success of this venture, and preferred to be cautious and wait before deeming it a success story. It was a good initiative, possible because of the personal involvement of a woman member of the Commission for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. However, at the moment, a natural calamity in the form of failure of the monsoons seems to have befallen the group and the future does not look too bright.

It is worth pointing out that micro credit ventures are more successful in the Southern and Western parts of India as compared to the north. In the north, the number of self-help groups are increasing, but the ideology and the spirit is yet to take hold. The reasons behind this phenomena have yet to be studied in depth.

However, one could assert nevertheless that micro-credit/micro-finance are increasingly gaining foothold in the Indian socio-economic milieu. The number of self-help groups has been on the rise and a rising number of Governmental and non-Governmental agencies are venturing into this field.

A Feminist Critique of the Micro Credit Approach

On the face of it, micro credit would seem to be the *mantra* which can wave away poverty and its accompanying problems and usher in an era of economic prosperity and empowerment, particularly for women. However, the *insides* of the structure may not be as imposing as the *facade*; the potentially empowering ability of micro credit for women, particularly in the restricted environment in which a majority of the women operate, may be no more than a smokescreen. A few *posers* come to mind: Can providing micro credit without skill building actually work for poverty alleviation? Can micro credit

eliminate poverty without simultaneously addressing issues of equality and equity? Can the provision of micro credit for social purposes, such as a daughter's wedding, roofing of a house, or paying doctor's bills (howsoever helpful these may be in times of crisis) lead to the empowerment of women? What is to ensure that the loans taken by women are not actually used by the males, leaving the burden of repayment upon the women?

A feminist critique of micro credit is gradually gaining ground. It is asserted that women's ability to benefit from micro credit is limited by the constraints they experience because of their gender, which limits the opportunities available to them. These include a woman's lack of skill, experience, knowledge and confidence as well as familial and socially imposed constraints such as norms of behaviour, rights and social values.

The impact of credit also varies in accordance with the socio-economic background of the individual. The poorest amongst the poor may not be in a position to start an enterprise on their own. Thus only the relatively better off venture into the scheme as immediately money has to be found for repayment. Furthermore the "core" poor lack access to markets, some minimal family assets as well as capacity for taking risks, all of which form a significant aspect of a micro credit venture. In this context, the potential of micro credit in helping the poorest of the poor to rise above the poverty line becomes a questionable issue.

Credit, then, rarely reaches the poorest people, because the small sums which they require are too tiny to generate interest and too expensive to deliver. Moreover, only an elite few are actually able to take advantage of the opportunities provided through micro credit due to some reason or the other. As observed in the Human Development Report of South Asia "The benefits of competitive markets and other mainstays of globalisation such as information technology have been skewed towards the elite minority of South Asian women. The new markets, tools, and rules of this global era have failed to alleviate the poverty of most of South Asia's women."⁴²

It is also significant to point out that persons who form groups and access credit under the Swarnajanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) lose their 'below poverty line' status. This not only deprives them of all its consequent benefits and entitlements, but also falsifies official statistics of persons living below the poverty line.

The emphasis upon micro credit may be merely a diversionary tactic adopted by international agencies to draw away attention from the deleterious impacts of globalisation and structural adjustment. The Governments, it may be stated, are merely trying to camouflage the reality of feminisation of poverty by providing micro credit. In the Indian context, it must be stated that all micro credit schemes, whether it be of NABARD or Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, are target oriented, i.e. focussing on creating so many groups in a year. If that were the guarantee of success, then there should have been a decline in the graph of female poverty, which, as the statistics cited above reveal, is not the case.

The effectiveness of micro-credit for empowerment of women is equally hampered by its promotion of self-enterprise for poverty alleviation. This has certain intrinsic limitations in that, one, it lacks permanence and reliability, which are the major demands of the poor and the disempowered; secondly, women lack the necessary skills, guidance and training to run viable self-enterprises and thirdly, lack of market incentives and infrastructure can have a dampening effect upon any enterprise as borrowers are left with limited options to make profitable investments.⁴³ In any case, **credit by itself cannot ensure empowerment, because it can never overcome the patriarchal systems of subordination, which are so firmly entrenched in our society.**

Notwithstanding the fact that micro credit is lauded for its excellent repayment rates, its repayment mechanism is highly coercive⁴⁴ and relies on women's traditional timidity to maintain its repayment record, instead of increasing their autonomy, thus making them into mascots for their households for obtaining loans.⁴⁵ The almost hundred per cent repayment rates are no guarantee for its effectiveness as a tool for poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. The poorest women may also be excluded from a self help group as they may not be able to keep to the repayment schedule. The problem is compounded by the fact that repayments have to begin within a week of taking the loan, which forces the debtor to save in order to pay back and ensures that the project remains on a small scale.

It is also noteworthy that although the micro credit strategy lays emphasis upon savings, the interest given by banks on those savings is below 4%, while the interest upon the money loaned out exceeds 12%. In addition the groups are not allowed to withdraw saved money for a period of six months, which places quite a large amount of cash at the disposal of banks to loan out at high rates of interest. As a result the banking sector is able to generate high profits, which effectively validates the statement '*in the service of the poor, incidentally to enrich myself*'.

It likewise needs to be emphasised that what is significant is not the amount of money loaned out, but the use to which the money is put. Have the loans resulted in productive assets which benefit the women? Has it provided her relief in the short or long term, has she been able to lessen her exploitation by the immediate economic environment she works in? Although touted as a vehicle for poverty alleviation by providing funds to enable the poor to embark on commercial ventures, the loans are often used by them to meet their daily consumption needs. Thus, micro credit schemes need to be assessed, monitored and evaluated on the basis of set criteria for their gender impact.

In sum, it may be emphatically stated that the proponents of this approach are merely glossing over its contradictions. Women taking loans may actually end up being worse off than before. The loan may be appropriated by a male family member, generally the husband, who may not make the repayments, which lands the woman into debt, thus worse off than before. It is also questionable whether as most small loans are used by women to reinforce traditional female activities such as raising livestock they are really empowering women at all. Then there is a debate about whether setting up women as small entrepreneurs is merely adding to their burden of existing unpaid domestic work. Micro credit and small business opportunities for women caught in the cycle of absentee husbands and urban drift can only provide a short term answer to the problems posed by globalisation. Giving women credit may not be the most effective strategy for bringing them into the mainstream. There is a need to question the entire paradigm and strategy of development and focus on the ultimate objective, which is empowerment of women to play a critical role in the socio-economic and political processes and decision-making. Providing women with small amounts of money to set up small projects such as rope weaving and other traditional occupations is not empowering them. Micro credit needs to go beyond its limited range and scope, reinterpreting its objectives and methodologies in the light of the feminist framework of development and empowerment, to meet the challenges offered by globalisation and enable women to avail of the opportunities it offers as real actors in the whole process.

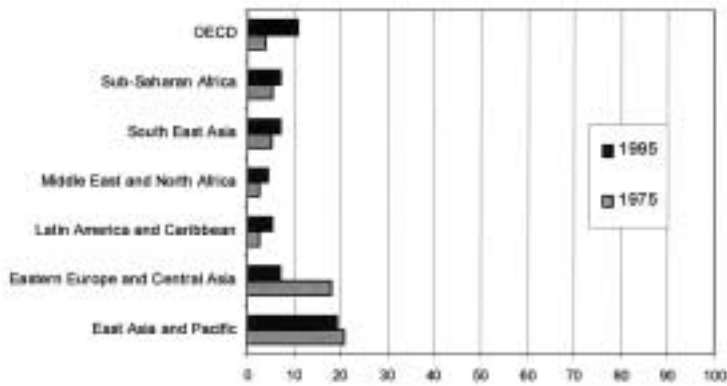
Concluding Remarks

Undoubtedly, microcredit can be an invaluable tool for eradicating poverty and empowering women. However, to be effective, it must operate in concentric circles with ever widening reach, if it is not to be

limited to merely creating some small oasis in the vast desert of poverty. For the ultimate aim has to be not merely to provide funds to women but to give them an opportunity to control their destinies; to lift them out of the dire straits of poverty and the bottomless wells of unfulfilled desires and finally, to give them a say in their homes, their communities and their states, so as to actually EMPOWER them.

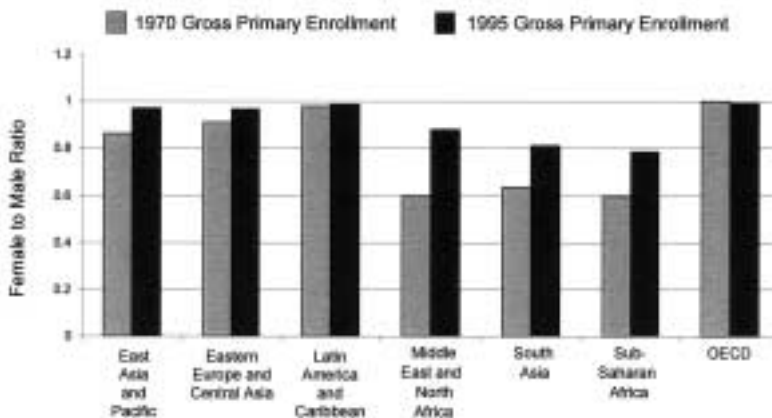
Annexure 1

Women are vastly underrepresented in parliaments



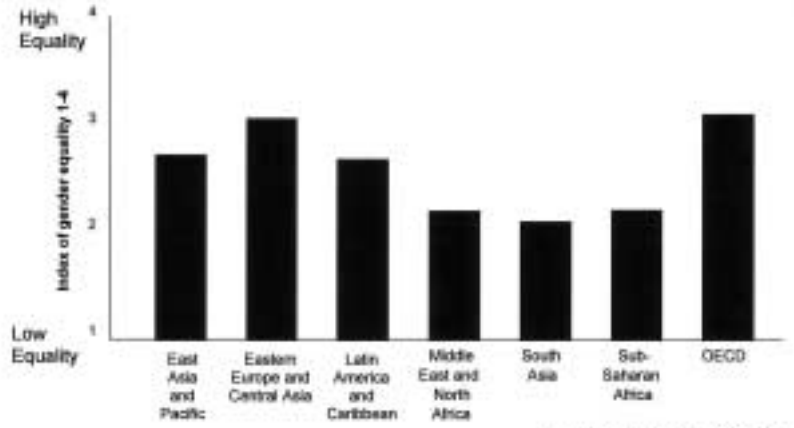
Source: *Engendering Development...* World Bank, 2001.

Despite improvements, female to male primary school enrollment ratios remain below 1.0 in some regions



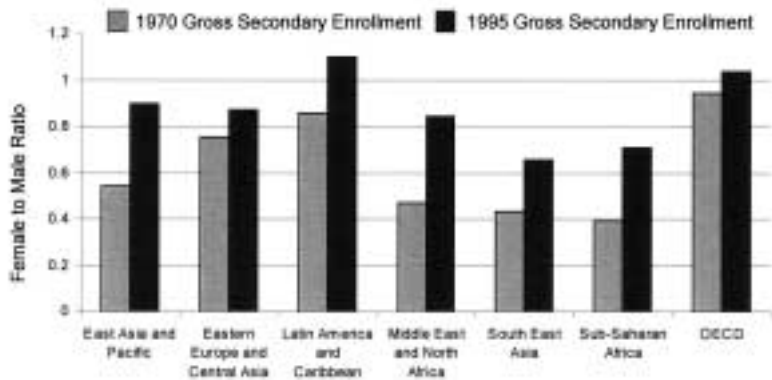
Source: *Engendering Development...* World Bank, 2001.

In no region of the world are women and men equal in legal, social or economic rights



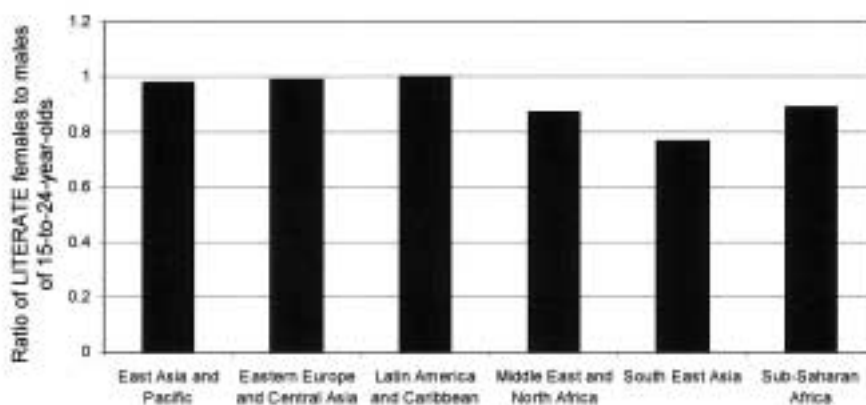
Source: Engendering Development... World Bank, 2001.

The same holds true for secondary education...



Source: Engendering Development... World Bank, 2001.

In several regions, fewer females than males ages 15-to-24 are literate



Source: World Development Indicators

¹ “Gender inequalities impose large costs on the health and well-being of men, women and children and affect their ability to improve their lives. In addition to these personal costs, gender inequalities reduce productivity in farms and enterprises and thus lower prospects for reducing poverty and ensuring economic progress. Gender inequalities also weaken a country’s governance- and thus the effectiveness of its development policies.” **Engendering Development Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources and Voice**, (2001) Summary, Washington D.C., The World Bank, p.8.

² Pam Rajput and Hemlata Swarup (eds) (1994), **Women and Globalisation**, New Delhi, Ashish, p.xiii.

³ “The simplest but yet most compelling argument in favour of globalization is the idea that it enables resources to be used where they are most productive.” **1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work**, (1999) New York, United Nations, p.xvi.

⁴ Pam Rajput and Hemlata Swarup, *op.cit*, p.vii.

⁵ **Human Development in South Asia, 2001**, Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, Oxford, Karachi, 2002p.16.

⁶ *ibid* p. 47.

⁷ *ibid*, p.47.

⁸ The global protests against WTO had its counterpart in India in the form of celebration of a Global Day of Action against Capitalism and the WTO by diverse mass-based movements representing various sections of the population including women.

⁹ Nicholas Stern, (n.d) **A Strategy for Development**, Washington, The World Bank, p.53.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Rekha Mehra and Sarah Gammage, (1999) “Trends, Countertrends and Gaps in Women’s Employment”, **27 WORLD DEV**, p.533.

¹¹ See Alfred C.Aman Jr. (1996) “Introduction: Feminism and Globalization: The impact of Global Economy on

Women and Feminist Theory”, **4 Ind.J. Global Legal Stud**, pp. 1, 4.

¹² Mention may be made of some of the opportunities offered by globalisation. These include: an increase in global trade, which has offered increasing opportunities and allowed for more diverse lifestyles; diminished the national markets and paved the way for fall of protectionist barriers leading to free flow of capital; acceleration in the scale of currency and financial dealings across the world; information technology which has made instant global communication possible; made the realisation of Marshal McLuhan’s ‘global village’ a possibility; and created global movements for/against issues of concern to humanity at large. Above all, it has itself made a global protest against globalisation possible.

¹³ Numerous studies can be cited including studies conducted by the Centre for Micro Studies in Bangladesh, a study by Dr.T.K.Rajalakshmi, “Sita and her Daughters” Panos Features, May 1, 1999; Abdullah Siddiqui, Bangladesh: Human Rights in Export Processing Zones, Asian Labour Update, Issue 38, Jan-March, 2001; The Dabhindu Collective, Problems faced by Women Working in Sri Lanka’s Export Processing Zones, *ibid*.

¹⁴ **UNDP Human Development Report 2000**, p. 36.

¹⁵ Digumarti Bhaskara Rao et al, (2000), Status and Advancement of Women, New Delhi, A.P.H.Pub Corp, p.46.

¹⁶ See for instance, The Brundtland Commission Report, **Our Common Future** (1987), the **1989 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development** by UN Vienna Centre of Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs; Commonwealth Expert Group on Women and Adjustment, **Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s** (1990),

¹⁷ <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/06hrights.../Globalization.ht>

¹⁸ **1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work, United Nations**, New York, 1999, p.55.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.55.

²⁰ “The Unbreakable Link-Debt Relief and the Millennium development Goals”, Jubilee Research, New Economics Foundation, February 2002, p.7.

²¹ The impact of Structural Adjustment on PDS has been: One, the principle of entitlements has shifted from a per capita scale to a family scale; the monthly allocation has decreased; increase in the prices of foodgrains; various problems in targeting a section of population for benefiting under the PDS scheme, etc. **Womenspeak: United Voices against Globalisation, Poverty and Violence in India**, March 2000, p.6.

²² Punjab, one of the most highly developed states of India reveals a paradox in that it also has one of the highest rates of women suffering from anaemia.

²³ Main worker according to the Census of India (2001) is a person who has been employed for six months or more during the year preceding the Census.

²⁴ A person who has worked for less than six months (may be even for one day) during the last one year is termed as ‘Marginal Worker’ according to the Census of India (2001).

²⁵ In overall farm production, women’s average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour with percentages much higher in certain regions (Venkateswaran, 1992 *Living on the Edge: Women, Environment and Development*, New Delhi, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a one-hectare farm, a figure which illustrates women’s significant contribution to agricultural production (Singh in Shiva, 1988).

Depending on the region and crops, women’s contributions vary but they provide pivotal labour from planting to harvesting and post-harvest operations. Traditionally, women had usufruct rights to the community land. But after the land reforms, land titles were given to men, denying women’s access to land.

²⁶ Normally farmers keep a part of their crop to be used as seed for the next sowing. Crops grown with seed treated with terminator technology cannot be reused as seed.

²⁷ The Year 2001 was declared as the Year of Empowerment of Women in India and the Government of India also announce a comprehensive National Policy for Empowerment of Women.

²⁸ See the **Human Development Report 1999, the 1998 Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Report of South Asia**.

²⁹ Jeanne Vickers, (1991) **Women and World Economic Crisis**, London, Zed Books, p.15.

³⁰ Here it is necessary to distinguish between micro credit and microfinance. Micro credit is a narrower concept, focusing on only credit, while the latter is a wider concept and includes support services and extends beyond traditional lending. The two terms are often used interchangeably, while as a matter of fact, there is considerable difference between the two. *Micro credit* refers to the provision of credit only. *Microfinance* covers a broader range of financial services, encompassing micro credit but also including savings, insurance, leasing, housing, and payment and remittance services. In the 1980s, the emphasis in poverty alleviation campaigns was on the provision of loans or credit (*micro credit*) for income-generating activities. Now, as more is known about the poor and their needs, the value of providing a broader range of financial services (*microfinance*) has become better understood.

³¹ **Resolution 52/194 of 18 December 1997.**

³² Five years after the Beijing Conference (1995) a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly was held in June 2000 in New York, to review the progress made and is known as Beijing +5. The Document adopted at this Conference is known as the Outcome Document.

³³ **Womenspeak**, op.cit, p.35.

³⁴ A national credit fund, which seeks to extend credit facilities to poor and needy women. It has extended loans to 20,000 self-help groups of women and has a membership of over 3,00,000. See **Women in India: A Profile**, (2000),DWCD, Ministry of HRD, Govt of India.

³⁵ Also known as **Swa Shakti Project**, it is a centrally sponsored project for five years with the objective of strengthening women empowerment processes through creation of self help groups. See *ibid*.

³⁶ This is a holistic credit-cum-subsidy programme covering all aspects of self-employment such as organisation of the poor into self-help groups in training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing. The implementation is through Panchayat Samitis (institutions of local self Government).

³⁷ This is an integrated scheme for women's empowerment, which is based on the formation of women's self help groups. The Indira Mahila Yojana has been recast and merged with the Mahila Samridhi Yojana for this scheme.

³⁸ National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, (2000-2001) NABARD & MicroFinance, (Report), p.4.

³⁹ see www.hvk.org/articles/0502/174.html

⁴⁰ A Panchayat is a village level governing body. Traditionally, it consisted of five (panch meaning five) elders. Now it is a democratically elected body with 33% of the seats reserved for women. (Reservation is provided for through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India.)

⁴¹ Dalits are the portion of the population falling outside the pale of Indian caste society; those who are traditionally known as the "*outcastes*," or, "*untouchables*."

⁴² See **Human Development in South Asia**, 2000, p.66 .

⁴³ *ibid*, p.67.

⁴⁴ Kenneth Anderson, (2002) "Micro credit: Fulfilling or Belying the Universalist Morality of Globalizing Markets?" **Yale Human Rights and Development L.J.**, Vol 5, p.94.

⁴⁵ Sachetna, (1999) **Some thoughts on Micro credit for Empowerment**, Occasional Paper 1, Sachetna Information Centre, Calcutta, p.19.