



UNITED NATIONS

COMMISSION ON

THE STATUS OF

WOMEN

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Introduction:

In today's world, where over three billion live in poverty, earning less than \$2.50 a day, and a further 1.3 billion live in extreme poverty, earning less than \$1.25 a day, it seems to be problematic for the international community as a whole. The figures have bathed in the attention of not only the superpowers, but of other countries too that remain worried about their increasing and worsening nature. The problem, unfortunately, is bigger

than what it seems to be at the end as these figures are not evenly divided between the gender binary, however, facts prove that more females are subject to poverty in comparison to males, and this, in most places, is not so simply due to circumstance. The causes will be discussed further on in this guide. The United Nations has taken into account these growing facts and figures as well as the reasons behind this phenomenon, and has taken some measures to curb it, however, these remain unsuccessful as the problem yet still exists to this day on a very large scale. According to Diana Pearce, a visiting researcher at the University of Wisconsin, over two-thirds of the United States' poor over the age of 16 are

women. Although in many different countries more women have entered the labor force in the past 20-30 years, the number of female-headed households has substantially increased. Many governments have not shown sufficient support for divorced or single mothers, leading to increased risks of poverty. In addition, increased acceptance of modern households and the tolerance and support of divorce, non-marital births, and child-support disputes have lead to

augmented numbers of female-headed households around the world, in turn leading to increased rates of poverty. The feminization of poverty is something that has originated in the United States, but its recognition has spurred worldwide debate upon the validity of the term along with legislative action among governments.

Definitions/

clarifications:

- Feminization of poverty:

The feminization of poverty is known as the phenomenon in which women represent disproportionate percentages of the world's poor. This is usually due to the pre-existence of stereotypes and gender biases, along with the disparate income between men and women. These very women are then further denied access to things like credit, and inheritance, which could in turn better their life, and have no choice but to turn to agencies like prostitution, and beggary. Their labor goes unrewarded and unrecognized. Their health care

and nutritional needs are not given priority; they lack sufficient access to education and support services, and their participation in decision-making at home and in the community are minimal.

The United Nations understood the severity of this issue and met in 1995 for the Beijing annual conference where they categorized the issue to be one of the 12 critical issues pertaining to the world today. In 1996, the united nations commission for the status of women met and decided upon measures to curb this problem such as giving aid to countries as well as having laws pertaining to equal rights in the economy, political regard and other areas of a country.

Countries had to further sport the

results of such implementations.

Some examples of this are:

- In Uganda, there is now an understanding that only by incorporating a gender perspective in all aspects of the National Poverty Eradication Action Plan can the goal to eradicate mass poverty by the year 2017 be achieved.
- Cameroon, Madagascar and Niger have identified women as a specific target group in their national poverty eradication programs.
- Senegal has conducted gender training for senior decision-makers to mainstream a gender

perspective into sectorial development planning.

- In 1998, the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs devoted resources to special projects for the development of entrepreneurial skills among women.
- Denmark's development assistance policy calls for the inclusion of a gender perspective in all programs.
- Singapore has implemented the Small Families Improvement Scheme, the purpose of which is to help low-income families to get access to education and housing.



Causes:

- The glass ceiling:

A problem that prevails today is the disparate income between men and women even in situations where they apply for the same job, and the same position. This is known as the glass ceiling and is criminally practiced by many businesses, and even governments at the end without any feelings of remorse. If a female applies for the position of a teacher and is paid \$500 a month, a male who applies for the same job, for the same working hours may be paid \$600. This results in a negative balance of payments for the female especially divorcees and single mothers. Some examples and case

studies of this are

1. In the UK, a classroom assistant made a claim for equal pay on the basis that her job was very challenging in providing support and learning from children with autism in a mainstream school.

In her view, her job also required a high level of skill in knowing of developments in occupational, speech and behavioral therapy, knowledge of the school curriculum and specific skills in working with autistic children.

She compared her pay to that of gravediggers and road workers, who were also employed by the municipality, who earned an average of 20% more than her.

The woman's union supported her case and argued that women largely held the jobs of classroom teachers, whereas men largely

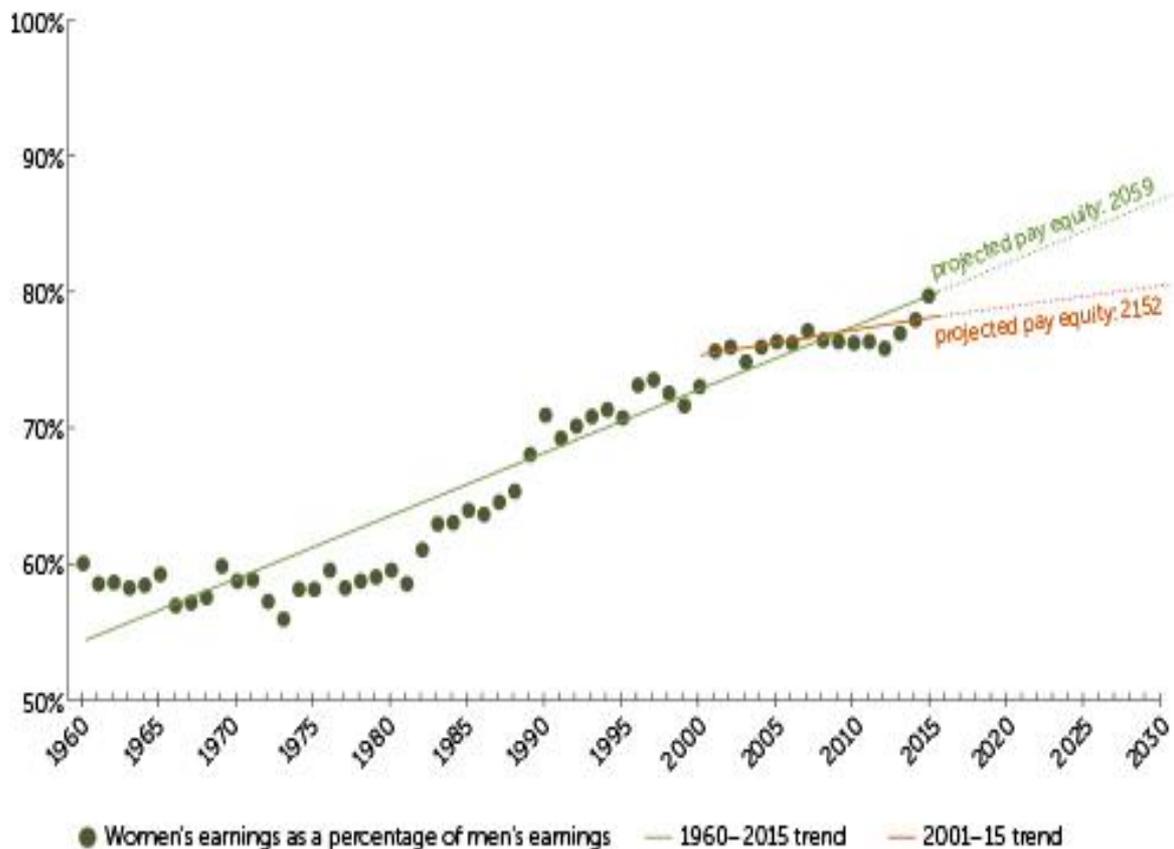
held the jobs of gravedigger and road workers.

2. A female Stockroom Manager made an equal pay claim comparing with her male predecessor who earned more than she did on the basis of like work.

The European Court of Justice found that the principle of equal pay for equal work guaranteed by the Treaty is not confined to situations in which a man and a woman are doing equal work for their employer contemporaneously. It also applies where a woman receives less pay than a man employed before her.

Over the years, women have made consistently less money than men.

Women's Median Annual Earnings as a Percentage of Men's Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, 1960–2015



Source: AAUW analysis of data from Proctor et al, U.S. Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015*

www.aauw.org 

Partially due to the types of jobs women conventionally go into or are forced to work in, then partially due to gender discrimination within a line of work. South Korea and Japan have the

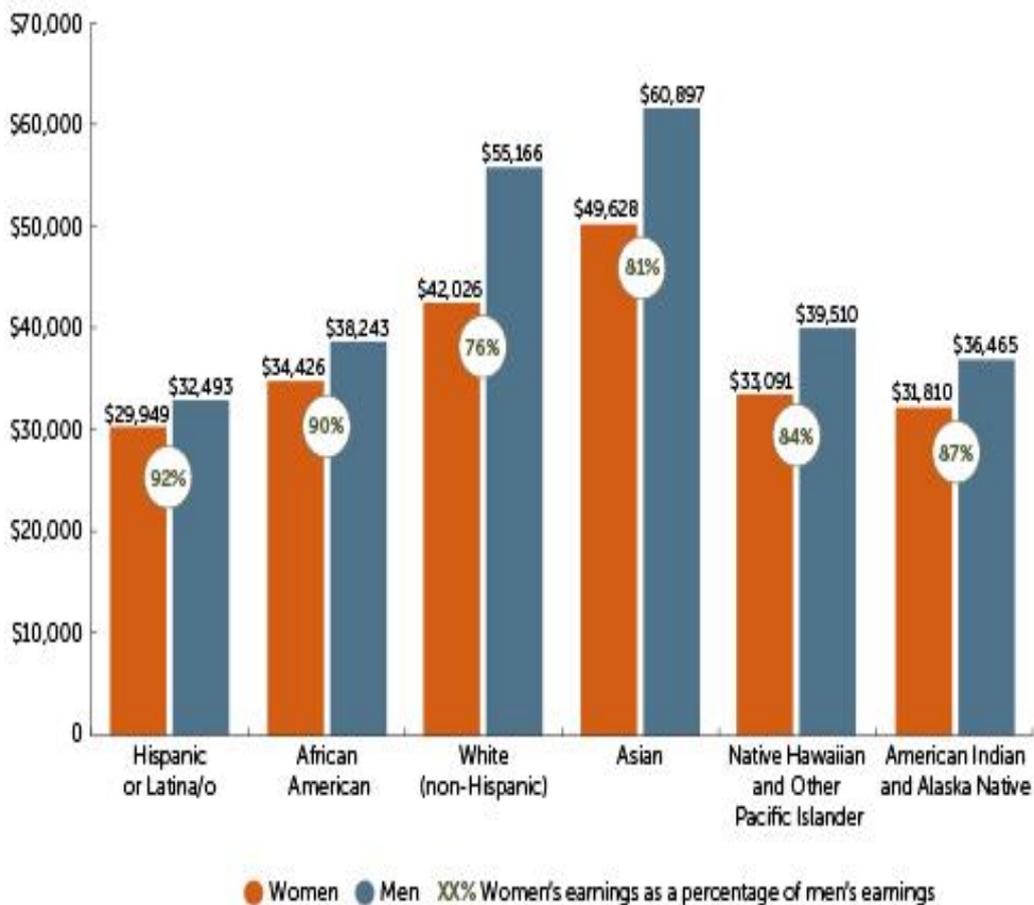
largest percentage wage gap, where women earn 30% less than men, compared to the gender wage gap in Belgium where women only earn 9.3% less than men according to data

presented by the
Organization for Economic
Cooperation and
Development. However, the
issue of the gender pay gap
isn't just a problem of
fairness, it's also a problem
of economic empowerment
for women and their
families. Due to the gender
pay gap, women working
full time are able to afford
less education, housing,
transportation, food, and
health care for themselves
and their families. For an
average 40-year career,
most working women in

first-world countries would earn \$431,360 more if the gender pay gap didn't exist. With that money, women could buy 2 houses, 14 new cars, or feed a family of four for almost 37 years. And most often, this cycle of poverty continues to the

next generation and the generation after that, therefore it is among all interests to end the cycle of poverty before it begins. In 2015 women working full time in the United States typically were paid just 80 percent of what men were

Median Annual Earnings, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

paid, a gap of 20 percent? While the number has gone up one percentage point from 2014, the change isn't statistically significant — because the increase is so small, mere tenths of a percent, it doesn't amount to perceptible change. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the earnings ratio hasn't had significant annual change since 2007. The gap has narrowed since the 1970s, due largely to women's progress in education and workforce participation and to men's wages rising at a slower rate. Still, the pay gap does not appear likely to go away on its own. At the rate of change

between 1960 and 2015, women are expected to reach pay equity with men in 2059. But even that slow progress has stalled in recent years. If change continues at the slower rate seen since 2001, women will not reach pay equity with men until 2152.

- **Misogyny**

Another problem that results, or is one of the major causes of female poverty is the misogyny and the discriminatory nature of many different businesses, and the general ideologies of individuals as well. Females are shunned in many societies when it

comes to having jobs and in conservative countries and environments; religious and emotional propaganda is used against them and they are forced, by the structures of society, to believe conspired lies such as it being “forbidden for them to work”, that “God made them poor for a reason”, and that being poor is good due to the ultimate award they’ll be given in paradise. It is also believed in many places that a woman’s sole and only job is to birth and nurture the child, whether she remain single, or married.

Although governments claim to provide these

women with alternatives, a lot of women are not given these and are forced into institutions like prostitution and beggary where they are yet still paid lesser than what they require.

Different types of Poverty for these women:

1. Absolute poverty:
Women living in third world countries where they lack the basic necessities to even conduct life usually experience this. Such women tend to undergo rap, or harassment on wide scale and are forced to work by some dominant member of their family. They also suffer from diseases such

as cholera, hepatitis, tuberculosis and many more which go untreated due to either insufficient funds, or restrictions from society. In conservative areas, women are forbidden from labor in hospitals, and instead, are made to conceive the child in harsh conditions, usually, in the house of the husband's parents without any proper medical sanitation, not only putting the woman, but the child in danger as well.

2. Situational poverty:

This is usually due to circumstance, as mentioned before, where women are put in negligent situations and they are

forced into poverty. This can happen for many reasons:

- a) The woman has not been provided with adequate education
- b) The woman is the breadwinner of the family with a low paying, minimum wage job
- c) The husband, after divorce or separation, refuses or is unable to give monthly pensions to the wife and child
- d) Continuous discrimination exists in the area, resulting in a lack of jobs for females

- e) Economical crisis may affect the poor the most, further increasing their helpless situation
- f) Widowed women, and single mothers tend to also be the ones at the end of the spectrum
- g) Child marriage is also another factor that contributes to the spread of poverty amongst women.
- burdens on their family, and from the time of birth, they receive less investment in their health, care and education. With the advent of puberty, differences in the ways that adolescent girls and boys are treated become much more pronounced. Adolescence is not viewed as a distinct phase of life; instead the onset of physical maturity is seen as an abrupt shift from childhood to adulthood. At puberty, girls' mobility is often restricted, which limits their access to livelihood, learning and recreational and social activities.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's socio-cultural environment contains pervasive gender discrimination, so girls and women face many obstacles to their development. Girls are often considered to be financial

Bangladesh's rates of child marriage and adolescent motherhood are among the highest in the world. Maternal mortality rates also remain extremely high. Poor maternal

health is the result of early marriage, women's malnutrition, a lack of access to and use of medical services and a lack of knowledge and information. Most women give birth without a skilled attendant.

In the home, women's mobility is greatly limited and their decision-making power is often restricted. For instance, about 48 per cent of Bangladeshi women say that their husbands alone make decisions about their health, while 35 per cent say that their husbands alone make decisions regarding visits to family and friends.

Violence against women is another major impediment to women's development. While the practice of child marriage has decreased in Bangladesh over the

last 30 years, it remains common in rural areas and urban slums, especially among the poor. The legal age of marriage is 18 for girls, however three-quarters of women aged 20-49 were married before age 18. The practice of arranging child marriages remains common, especially in rural areas and in urban slums, where many families believe that the onset of puberty signifies readiness for marriage.

Although the practice is illegal, it is common for the bride's family to pay a dowry to the family of the groom. There is evidence that the practice of dowry is becoming more common. In one study, women aged 46-60 reported that dowry was practically non-existent when they married, while

46% of women aged 15-25 reported that they had to pay dowry⁴. Dowry paying is more common in poorer sections of society, and it also reinforces poverty because it often renders families destitute.

Bangladesh's maternal mortality ratio is one of the highest in the region. Government figures estimate that there are 320 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, however UN estimates place the rate as high as 570 deaths per 100,000 live births. The prevalence of unattended home births, the high rate of births to adolescent girls, and malnourishment are the main contributors to the high maternal mortality rate. A woman's lifetime risk of dying in pregnancy or

childbirth is one in 51, compared to one in 47,600 in Ireland (the best performer). About 12,000 women die every year from pregnancy or childbirth complications.

Malnutrition is a significant contributor to complicated pregnancies and high maternal and infant mortality rates.

Malnutrition is also transmitted from one generation to the next as malnourished mothers give birth to infants who struggle to thrive. Malnourished children are physically weak, they lack resistance to disease, their academic performance suffers and they are less productive when they grow up.

There have been some modest improvements in past decades,

but the nutritional status of women in Bangladesh remains alarming. Almost one-third of women of reproductive age have a body mass index less than 18.5; this means they are very underweight. Even among the wealthiest quintile of society, 13 per cent of women are underweight. Girls are also slightly more likely to be stunted and underweight for their age, compared to boys of the same age.

Domestic violence is a pervasive problem in Bangladesh and presents a huge threat to the security of girls and women. In a 2007 research study, more than half of ever-married women aged 15-49 reported that they had

physical and/or sexual violence from their husbands, and one quarter had experienced it in the past year. Additionally, more than one-third of both men and women believe that men are justified in beating their wives in specific circumstances, such as arguing. The practice of dowry, a lower age at marriage, and poverty are all associated with women's higher likelihood of experiencing and condoning violence.

Adolescent girls are often victims of 'eve teasing' or sexual harassment and are not prepared to face such a situation.

In one of its most extreme forms, violence against women takes the form of acid attacks. Although legislation exists to prevent acid

attacks, enforcement remains weak. Since May 1999, there have been almost 3000 reported cases of acid throwing, the vast majority against girls and women, however many cases remain unreported.

Sadly, suicide is also common among girls aged between 14 and 17. The Bangladesh Health and Injury Survey reported that more than 2200 children, including about 1500 girls, committed suicide in 2004.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable during emergencies such as natural disasters, which are unfortunately a common occurrence in Bangladesh. Women's restricted decision-making power and mobility puts them at increased

risk of injury or death during cyclones or floods. For instance, an astonishing 90 per cent of the deaths in Bangladesh's 1991 cyclone were among women.

Protection issues also often arise after natural disasters, because normal care mechanisms break down and women and children may not have the security offered by their usual shelter. These factors can put women at increased risk of violence, rape, abuse and trafficking. For instance, after the 1998 floods, there was an increase in the number of girls moving to Dhaka to become sex workers.

Women have made important gains in the formal labor market in the past twenty years, mainly due to increased participation in

the garment sector and an NGO-led microcredit revolution that targets women. However, according to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2007, about 65 per cent of women aged 15-49 was unemployed in the year prior to the survey, compared to about 2 per cent of men in the same age group. For one in eight women who earn a wage, someone else decides how that wage will be spent.

Child labour is very common in Bangladeshi society, and national legislation on child labour is rarely enforced. About 8-9 per cent of girls between the ages of 5 and 14 are working, but a lot of girls work in jobs that are hidden from view, such as domestic work

and commercial sex work. Girls in particular, are often denied the right to work for a wage. For example, 58 per cent of female child domestic workers surveyed in a 2006 International Labor Organization study received no monetary wages, and when they did receive a wage their parents normally collected it.

Uganda

The majority of adults in Uganda have attended formal school (ROU, 2010d). However, many do not complete primary school. Retention in primary school is lower for females at 42 percent as compared to males at 53 percent. More boy children transition from primary to secondary school than girls. Similarly, there are more men who are able to read and

write than women. Urban areas also exhibit higher literacy rates than rural areas – a situation that has persisted over time.

University and tertiary education enrolment is still male-dominated, particularly in science and technology, though the situation has improved following the introduction of an affirmative action policy in favour of women in the early 1990s.¹⁹ For instance, Makerere University, the largest university (whose motto at its founding in 1922 was “in all things let us be men”), has adopted affirmative action policies from the 1989/90 academic year. These policies have raised women student’s enrolment from an average of about 25 percent at the start of

the policy to about half of the entire student population in 10 years (Makerere University, 2009). In its January 2010 graduation, the university presented graduates where women outnumbered for the first time (Mugagga, 2010).

The increase in female admissions was an outcome of an affirmative action policy.

Admissions have exhibited sensitivity to gender imbalance and a desire to address disparities in access that exist throughout the education system.

This policy is also important as it supports a pool of educated women to enter the Public Service and other professions. As the Public Service is expected to be merit-based, equal access to

higher education is an important long-term requirement.

On health, while Uganda has registered tremendous progress on the national AIDS response, HIV prevalence is higher for women than for men. According to the 2006 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS), the total fertility rate is high, at 6.7 births per woman. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) Statistical Abstract 2011 indicates the following: deliveries in health facilities decreased from 34 percent in 2009 to 33 percent in 2010; defilement, which is illegal sex with underage girls, was the most serious crime in 2010, accounting for over 46.7 percent of all crimes in 2010; maternal mortality, though still high, fell

from 505 in 2002 to 435 per 100,000 live births in 2005/2006; the proportion of births attended by skilled health workers was about 41 percent and the unmet family planning need was 40.6 percent in 2005/2006; and child bearing for most women in Uganda starts early. The UDHS found that, overall, 25 percent of teenagers had begun having children and that, by the age of 19, nearly sixty percent of women had begun to have children. This implies that the childcare role for women comes early and may affect their progress in the public administration, in turn implying that programmatic interventions aimed at strengthening family planning services and advocating for flexible working conditions

could be necessary.

With 35 percent of members of parliament being women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ranked Uganda at number 16 worldwide on the proportion of women in national legislatures – ahead of many developing and developed countries – as of 31 October 2011 (IPU, 2011). A provision in the LGA (1997) has ensured that one third of all local government councilors are women. With the transition to a multiparty system, more political opportunity has been provided in general and specifically for women. Some of the major political parties provide for 40 percent inclusion of women in party structures. Joint capacity-building for women in political

parties, in local governments, for members of parliament and women in the public administration could expand capacity across a broad spectrum and strengthen women's leadership in the public administration.

While Uganda has made tremendous progress in the area of gender equality, there are challenges in many areas. Despite the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act (2010), gender-based violence perpetuated against women and girls is still rife estimated at over 60 percent by various studies. Such violence appears to be socially accepted and accompanied by a culture of impunity. Maternal mortality is still amongst the highest in the

region and the division of labour in the household still burdens women rather than men. This also applies to women employed in the Public Service, who have to combine public and private roles.

At the household level, progress in the transformation of unequal gender roles has been relatively slow, due to persistent patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted negative attitudes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of men and women in all spheres of life.

Widowhood profoundly affects the status of women and undermines their security. For older women, discrimination and being subject to the practices of

property grabbing compounds their poverty and gender discrimination. Older women with disability suffer greater discrimination, poverty, stigma and isolation, gender-based violence and face obstacles in accessing justice. They also suffer discrimination in access to employment and health care.

The Beijing Conference

The founded UN Charter included a provision for equality between men and women (chapter III, article 8). Subsequently, from 1945 to 1975 various female officials within the United Nations and leaders of women's movements on the global stage attempted to turn these principles into action. The United Nations General Assembly passed a

resolution (resolution 3010) that 1975 should be International Women's Year. In December 1975, the UN General Assembly passed a further resolution (resolution 31/136) that 1976-1985 should be the "Decade of Women".

Action to be taken by

Governments:

a) Review and modify, with the full and equal participation of women, macroeconomic and social policies with a view to achieving the objectives of the Platform for Action;

a. Analyse, from a gender

perspective, policies and programmes - including those related to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment, external debt problems, taxation, investments, employment, markets and all relevant sectors of the economy - with respect to their impact on poverty, on inequality and particularly on women; assess their impact on family well-being and conditions and adjust them, as

appropriate, to promote more equitable distribution of productive assets, wealth, opportunities, income and services;

b. Pursue and implement sound and stable macroeconomic and sectorial policies that are designed and monitored with the full and equal participation of women, encourage broad-based sustained economic growth, address the structural causes of poverty and are

geared towards eradicating poverty and reducing gender-based inequality within the overall framework of achieving people-centred sustainable development;

c. Restructure and target the allocation of public expenditures to promote women's economic opportunities and equal access to productive resources and to address the basic social, educational and health needs of women, particularly

those living in poverty;

d. Develop agricultural and fishing sectors, where and as necessary, in order to ensure, as appropriate, household and national food security and food self-sufficiency, by allocating the necessary financial, technical and human resources;

e. Develop policies and programs to promote equitable distribution of food

within the household;

f. Provide adequate safety nets and strengthen State-based and community-based support systems, as an integral part of social policy, in order to enable women living in poverty to withstand adverse economic environments and preserve their livelihood, assets and revenues in times of crisis;

g. Generate economic policies that have a positive impact on the

employment and income of women workers in both the formal and informal sectors and adopt specific measures to address women's unemployment, in particular their long-term unemployment;

- h. Ensure access to free or low-cost legal services, including legal literacy, especially designed to reach women living in poverty;
- i.
- j. Undertake legislative and administrative

reforms to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies;

- k. Consider ratification of Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as part of their efforts to promote and protect the rights of indigenous people.

