OCCASIONAL PAPER 15

Beijing Plus 10: An Ambivalent Record on Gender Justice

by Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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March 2006

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Occasional Paper
was written for the preparation of the report *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*.
The work for this report is being carried out with the support of the European Union,
the Department for Research Co-operation of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida/SAREC),
the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Ottawa, Canada) and the government of the Netherlands.

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ISBN 92-9085-069-8

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acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
IFIs	international financial institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WLUML	Women Living Under Muslim Laws
WTO	World Trade Organization

summary
résumé
resumen

SUMMARY

The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (the "Beijing conference") was a landmark in policy terms, setting a global policy framework to advance gender equality. Ten years after Beijing, in March 2005, the UN's Commission on the Status of Women presided over an intergovernmental meeting in New York to review the progress achieved on the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This "Plus Ten" event was decidedly low key. Its aim was not agenda setting but agenda confirming; not policy formulation, but policy affirmation. Whether it proves to be part of an ongoing worldwide movement in support of gender equality, or whether it marks the decline of that process, is a question that many in international women's movements are asking. This paper, drawing on research undertaken for the UNRISD report, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*, reflects on the ambivalent record of progress achieved by women over the last decades and considers how the policy environment has changed over the period since the high point of the global women's movements.

Drawing on a number of commonly employed indicators of "women's progress", the paper argues that the record of achievement regarding gender equality is more ambivalent, and the causal influences more diverse and less unidirectional than is sometimes assumed. It also argues that development policies have an important role to play in securing outcomes, and that the first phase of the structural reforms (dating from the early 1980s) was in many respects negative for women. In the ten years since the Beijing Conference there have been some significant shifts in international development policy along with a growing appreciation of the need to develop gender aware policies. By the end of the 1980s, "market fundamentalism" and shock therapy had lost much of their appeal, opening up a space for new ideas and approaches in development policy and practice.

Growing discontent over the social effects of the reforms, as well as criticism from leading economists in the international financial institutions have brought about a policy shift, which is sometimes referred to as the "post-Washington Consensus". The new policies have shown a willingness to give social and political concerns greater attention, expressed under indicative headings such as "social capital" and "good governance". Social policy and, in particular, poverty relief moved up the scale of international priorities in the 1990s. But behind the apparent consensus forged by a shared vocabulary of "poverty reduction" and "social protection", there are conflicting understandings of social policy based on different values, priorities and understandings of state responsibility. There are serious concerns over whether sustainable routes out of poverty are being provided or can be provided in the absence of appropriate job creation measures and regional regeneration. Given women's greater share of responsibility for unpaid care work and their less advantageous access to cash and income-earning opportunities, the redefinition of state responsibility and the greater role given to market forces are likely to impact adversely on their time and their access to social benefits.

The retreat from market fundamentalism has seen a partial rehabilitation of the state as a significant actor in development, and emphasis has been placed on "good governance" through democracy, participation, decentralization and community ownership. A broad understanding of a "good governance" agenda would embrace political liberalization, participation and human rights, and would address problems of social inequality as part of a fundamental commitment to democracy. Such an agenda would encompass the kinds of issues of state legitimacy, capacity and accountability that social movements and women's movements have confronted for decades. Although governance reforms can and should address issues of government legitimacy and the public participation of socially excluded groups, they have often been dominated by a much narrower preoccupation. Hence, while the recent donor attention to the question of "good governance" is to be welcomed, much depends on how it is interpreted. A great deal depends on whether the democratization of politics and the participation of marginalized social groups are seen as integral to reform objectives and are embraced in institutional change; and on whether reducing social and gender inequalities are among the core principles guiding the programme of state institutional transformation. There are aspects of the current international political climate that place limits on this occurring, namely the rise to political power of conservative forces in the United States and elsewhere, and the attacks of 11 September 2001. While the first has seen the adoption by the United States of conservative policies with respect to women's reproductive and sexual rights, supported by religious forces, the latter has focused more attention and funding on "security" at the expense of development and human rights. The paper examines how this ensemble of changing international policy and political climate over the past decade has given rise to new issues and challenges for those active in global women's movements.

Maxine Molyneux is Professor of Sociology at the Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, and was a member of the Advisory Group set up by UNRISD for the report titled *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*. **Shahra Razavi** is Research Co-ordinator at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). She coordinated the research for the above-mentioned UNRISD report.

RÉSUMÉ

La Quatrième Conférence mondiale sur les femmes (dite "Conférence de Beijing"), tenue en 1995, a marqué un tournant en définissant dans les grandes lignes les politiques à appliquer dans le monde pour progresser vers l'égalité des sexes. Dix ans après Beijing, en mars 2005, la Commission de la condition de la femme de l'ONU a présidé une réunion intergouvernementale à New York pour examiner dans quelle mesure les engagements pris dans la Déclaration et le Programme d'action de Beijing avaient été honorés. Cette réunion "Plus 10" s'est faite résolument discrète. Son but était non pas d'établir un programme mais de le confirmer, non pas de définir des politiques mais de les réaffirmer. S'inscrit-elle dans une évolution mondiale favorable à l'égalité des sexes ou marque-t-elle le déclin du processus? C'est une question que beaucoup se posent dans les mouvements féminins internationaux. Ce document, qui s'inspire de recherches effectuées pour le rapport de l'UNRISD, *Egalité des sexes: En quête de justice dans un monde d'inégalités*, revient sur le bilan contrasté qui a été dressé des progrès accomplis par les femmes au cours des dernières décennies et étudie en quoi l'environnement politique a changé depuis ce moment fort dans la vie des mouvements féminins.

Se fondant sur un certain nombre d'indicateurs couramment employés pour mesurer les "progrès des femmes", les auteurs font valoir que les réussites en matière d'égalité des sexes sont plus ambivalentes et les causes plus diverses et moins unidirectionnelles qu'on ne le suppose parfois. Elles montrent aussi que les politiques de développement contribuent largement aux résultats et que la première phase des réformes structurelles (qui remonte au début des années 80) a été, à bien des égards, néfaste pour les femmes. Au cours des dix ans qui se sont écoulés depuis la Conférence de Beijing, la politique internationale du développement a connu des revirements importants et l'on a pris conscience de la nécessité de définir des politiques prenant en compte le genre. A la fin des années 80, le "fondamentalisme marchand" et la thérapie de choc avaient perdu beaucoup de leur attrait, laissant place à des idées et approches nouvelles dans la politique et la pratique du développement.

Le mécontentement croissant suscité par les répercussions sociales des réformes, ainsi que les critiques formulées par des économistes haut placés dans les institutions financières internationales (IFI) ont entraîné un changement de politique que l'on appelle souvent "l'après-Consensus de Washington". Les nouvelles politiques ont témoigné de la volonté d'accorder plus d'attention aux préoccupations sociales et politiques, qui s'est manifestée par l'emploi de titres révélateurs comme "capital social" et "bonne gouvernance". Dans les années 90, la politique sociale et, en particulier, la réduction de la pauvreté ont remonté dans l'échelle des priorités. Mais bien que l'emploi d'un vocabulaire commun, celui de la "pauvreté" et de la "protection sociale", donne l'apparence d'un consensus, la politique sociale fait l'objet de conceptions contradictoires qui reposent sur des valeurs, des priorités et des représentations différentes de la mission de l'Etat. Est-il possible d'arracher durablement des populations à la pauvreté en l'absence de mesures suffisantes de création d'emplois et de relance des régions? La question suscite de sérieuses préoccupations. Les femmes assumant une plus grand part des soins non rémunérés et ayant moins d'occasions d'être rétribuées en espèces et de percevoir un revenu, la redéfinition de la responsabilité de l'Etat et le rôle plus grand laissé au marché risquent de se traduire pour elles par une limitation de leur temps libre et un moindre accès aux avantages sociaux.

Le recul du fondamentalisme marchand s'est accompagné d'une réhabilitation partielle de l'Etat comme acteur important du développement et l'accent a été mis sur une "bonne gouvernance", réalisable par la démocratie, la participation, la décentralisation et la réappropriation par la population. Un programme de "bonne gouvernance", compris au sens large, couvrirait la libéralisation politique, la participation et les droits de l'homme et amènerait à s'attaquer aux inégalités sociales comme engagement fondamental à la démocratie. Un tel programme engloberait aussi les questions de la légitimité de l'Etat, de sa capacité et de son obligation de rendre des comptes, ce que réclame les mouvements sociaux et féminins depuis des décennies. Bien que les réformes de la gouvernance puissent et doivent tenter de résoudre les questions de la légitimité gouvernementale et de la participation aux affaires publiques des groupes sociaux exclus, leur souci dominant a été souvent beaucoup moins noble. Ainsi, s'il faut se réjouir de l'attention que les donateurs accordent depuis peu à la "bonne gouvernance", encore faut-il savoir ce que l'on entend par là. La démocratisation politique et la participation des groupes sociaux marginalisés font-elles partie intégrante des objectifs de réforme et sont-elles inscrites au programme du changement des institutions? La réduction des inégalités sociales et entre les sexes figure-t-elle parmi les principes de base qui doivent guider la transformation des institutions de l'Etat? Certains aspects du climat politique international actuel, notamment l'arrivée au pouvoir de forces conservatrices aux Etats-Unis et ailleurs et les attentats du 11 septembre, freinent cette évolution. Si l'arrivée au pouvoir de forces conservatrices aux Etats-Unis a eu pour conséquence l'adoption, avec l'appui de forces religieuses, de politiques conservatrices sur les questions des droits des femmes en matière de procréation et de sexualité, les attentats du 11 septembre ont focalisé l'attention et les crédits sur la "sécurité" au détriment du développement et des droits de l'homme. Les auteurs examinent comment ces différents facteurs, qui ont modifié la politique internationale et le climat politique depuis dix ans, ont été pour ceux qui militent dans les mouvements féminins à travers le monde à l'origine de nouvelles questions et difficultés.

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RESUMEN

La Cuarta Conferencia Mundial de la Mujer (la "Conferencia de Beijing") fue un acontecimiento histórico desde el punto de vista de las políticas, pues en ella se estableció un marco mundial de políticas para hacer progresar la igualdad de género. Trascurridos 10 años desde la Conferencia de Beijing, en marzo de 2005, la Comisión de la Condición Jurídica y Social de la Mujer de las Naciones Unidas presidió una reunión intergubernamental que tuvo lugar en Nueva York para examinar los avances alcanzados en el cumplimiento de los compromisos adquiridos en virtud de la Declaración de Beijing y la Plataforma de Acción. Este acontecimiento, conocido como "Beijing +10", tuvo un perfil decididamente bajo. Su meta no era definir una agenda, sino confirmar la agenda existente; no se proponía formular políticas, sino afirmar las existentes. La pregunta que se hacen muchos movimientos femeninos internacionales es si este evento forma parte de un esfuerzo mundial en curso a favor de la igualdad de género o si señala el deterioro de este proceso. En el presente trabajo, que se alimenta de la investigación que se hiciera para el informe de UNRISD titulado *Igualdad de género: La lucha por la justicia en un mundo desigual*, se reflexiona sobre la historia ambivalente de los avances que han logrado las mujeres en las últimas décadas y se examina la forma en que el entorno de políticas ha cambiado durante todo el tiempo transcurrido desde que se celebrara el evento que ha constituido el punto culminante de los movimientos femeninos mundiales.

A partir de una serie de indicadores utilizados comúnmente para medir el "avance de la mujer", el documento sostiene que el historial de logros en materia de igualdad de género es más ambivalente y las influencias causales más diversas y menos unidireccionales de lo que en ocasiones se supone. También se indica que las políticas de desarrollo tienen un importante papel que desempañar para garantizar la obtención de resultados y que la primera fase de las reformas estructurales (que datan desde principios de los años 80) fue en muchos sentidos negativa para la mujer. En los 10 años transcurridos desde la Conferencia de Beijing, se han dado algunos cambios importantes en la política de desarrollo internacional y una valoración cada vez mayor de la necesidad de formular políticas sensibles a la cuestión de género. Para finales de los años 80, el "fundamentalismo de mercado" y la terapia de choque habían perdido buena parte de su atractivo, abriendo así espacio para nuevas ideas y enfoques sobre políticas y prácticas de desarrollo.

El creciente descontento con los efectos sociales de las reformas y las críticas que han formulado importantes economistas de las instituciones financieras internacionales (IFI) han generado un cambio de políticas que con frecuencia se denomina el "Consenso post-Washington". Las nuevas políticas han demostrado una disposición a brindar mayor atención a las inquietudes sociales y políticas, lo cual puede constatarse en conceptos como "capital social" y "buen gobierno". La política social y, en especial, la reducción de la pobreza lograron ascender en la escala de prioridades internacionales durante los años 90. No obstante, tras este aparente consenso que se forjase en torno al vocabulario compartido de "pobreza" y "protección social", existen interpretaciones encontradas de la política social en razón de las diferencias en cuanto a los valores, prioridades y visiones de la responsabilidad del Estado. Existen serias preocupaciones sobre si se está brindando o pueden brindarse opciones sostenibles para superar la pobreza en un contexto donde no existen medidas apropiadas de creación de empleos y de regeneración regional. Habida cuenta de que la mayor parte de la responsabilidad por el trabajo doméstico no remunerado recae sobre la mujer y que tiene menos acceso al dinero y a las oportunidades de generación de ingresos, es probable que la redefinición de la responsabilidad del Estado y el papel preponderante conferido a las fuerzas de mercado incidan negativamente sobre el tiempo y el acceso de la mujer a los beneficios sociales.

El retiro del fundamentalismo de mercado ha permitido una rehabilitación parcial de la función del Estado como actor protagónico en el desarrollo, y se ha enfatizado el "buen gobierno" a través de la democracia, la participación, la descentralización y la integración de la sociedad. Una interpretación integral de la agenda del "buen gobierno" abarcaría la liberalización política, la participación, los derechos humanos y atender los problemas de desigualdad social como parte del compromiso fundamental con la democracia. Esta agenda comprendería cuestiones como la legitimidad del Estado y problemas de capacidad y rendición de cuentas que los movimientos sociales y los movimientos femeninos han confrontado durante décadas. Si bien las reformas de la gobernanza pueden y deben atender las cuestiones relativas a la legitimidad del gobierno y la participación pública de los grupos socialmente marginados, tales reformas se han visto frecuentemente dominadas por una preocupación más limitada. De allí que, si bien la reciente atención que han prestado los donantes al "buen gobierno" es un acontecimiento positivo, mucho depende de cómo se interprete tal hecho. Una buena parte depende de si, por un lado la democratización de la política y la participación de los grupos sociales marginados se entienden como parte integral de los objetivos de la reforma y se incorporan al cambio institucional y, por otro lado, si la reducción de las desigualdades sociales y de género figura entre los principios fundamentales que orientan el programa de transformación institucional del Estado. Existen algunos aspectos del actual clima político internacional que limitan las posibilidades de que esto se cristalice, a saber, el aumento del poder político de las fuerzas conservadoras en los Estados Unidos y otros países y los sucesos del 11 de septiembre. Aunque el primero de estos hechos ha llevado a la adopción, por parte de Estados Unidos y con el apoyo de las fuerzas religiosas, de políticas conservadoras en cuanto a los derechos reproductivos y sexuales de la mujer, el último ha llevado a que se preste más atención y se asigne más financiamiento a la "seguridad", en detrimento del desarrollo y los derechos humanos. En este trabajo se analizan la forma en que estos cambios en la política y el clima político internacionales en la última década han propulsado el surgimiento de nuevos problemas y desafíos para quienes participan en los movimientos femeninos mundiales.

Maxine Molyneux es Profesora de sociología en el Institute for the Study of the Americas, Universidad de Londres; ha sido miembro del grupo asesor creado por UNRISD para el informe *Igualdad de gênero: La lucha for la justicia en um mundo desigual*. **Shahra Razavi** es Coordinadora de Investigación del Instituto de Investigación de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Social (UNRISD) y ha coordinado la investigación del mencionado informe.

I.

introduction

In March 2005, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women held an intergovernmental meeting in New York to review the progress achieved on the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This event, dubbed "Beijing Plus 10", or B+10 for short, was in marked contrast to the spirited mood and large attendance of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing only a decade before. At B+10, as in all such events, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and government representatives presented their progress reports, and concluding statements were duly made which acknowledged the "considerable advances" that women had achieved and the equally considerable "challenges" that remained. Defiant NGO reports deplored government indifference and inaction, and some spoke of betrayal, as in the report produced by the Women's Environment and Development Organization for the occasion: *Beijing Betrayed*.[1] But there was little excitement; the outcome was predictable, and the atmosphere was subdued.

If the "Beijing conference" was a landmark in policy terms, setting a global policy framework to advance gender equality,[2] the Plus 10 events were decidedly low key. An international conference on the scale of Beijing was ruled out despite the growing numbers of those participating in these events. Many policy actors—activist groups and networks as well as many within the UN—feared that in the current political climate, a world conference risked eroding the negotiated position that was reached in the Plus Five conferences in 2000. Hence, the aim of the Plus 10 conference was not agenda setting, but agenda confirming; not policy formulating, but policy affirming. In the event, much time was spent during the formal negotiations at the UN on the controversial but unsuccessful amendment proposed by the United States (US) delegation.[3] Overall, the general mood in the regional meetings, as in New York, was defensive rather than forward looking or celebratory, in tune with the more sombre and cautious *zeitgeist* that has come to dominate world affairs in recent times.[4]

Beijing Plus 10's achievement was to re-affirm the consensus reached 10 years earlier that was encoded in the Platform—not an insignificant one, given the increasingly organized opposition from conservative coalitions. But whether B+10 proves to be part of an ongoing worldwide movement in support of gender equality, or whether it marks the decline of that process, is a question that many in the international women's movements are asking. There are reasons for both optimism and pessimism, and it is far too early for any realistic appraisal.

1 The full title of the report was *Beijing Betrayed: Women Worldwide Report that Governments Have Failed To Turn the Platform into Action* (WEDO 2005a).

2 At Beijing, governments elaborated the guiding principles and obligations for the protection of women's human rights contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Inspired by Article Two of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it obligates states to repeal all existing laws, regulations, penal provisions, customs and practices which discriminate against women.

3 Initially, the US delegation insisted that it would not reaffirm its commitment unless language was inserted specifying that the Platform conferred no new international human rights, including no right to abortion. Faced with considerable opposition from other official delegations and women's leaders attending the conference, the US delegation withdrew its proposals and finally joined in the global consensus (WEDO 2005b).

4 Interviews by Maxine Molyneux with participants.

However, the question does invite a broader reflection on what has, and has not, been achieved so far and why. This requires a consideration of the various claims that have been made by those in the development policy world regarding the "progress of women", but it also provokes another kind of reflection—on how the policy environment has changed over the period since the high point of the global women's movement. In this paper, drawing on research which was undertaken for the UNRISD report, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (UNRISD 2005),[5] we consider these issues by examining three claims made in the mainstream development literature regarding women's progress in the light of the policy shifts that have occurred in the last few decades. We go on to study how the changing international policy and political climate over this period has thrown up new issues and challenges for women's movements.

5 UNRISD commissioned some 60 research papers as background documents for this report, in addition to drawing on in-house research (some of these papers are being published in the UNRISD Occasional Paper Series). The English language version of the report was launched on 7 March 2005 in New York. Shahra Razavi was Research Co-ordinator at UNRISD, overseeing the Report; Maxine Molyneux was a member of the Advisory Group that UNRISD had set up for the Report. The present article aims to reflect the analysis and arguments developed in the report.

II.

narratives of progress

It is uncommon to find confident assertions of progress in these sceptical times. It is widely accepted in academic and policy circles that what counts as progress is always contested, as the concept itself has undergone revision and qualification. What counts as progress *for women* has become an especially disputed and politicized question in the face of visions of "the good society", and of women's place within it. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus that the standard indicators of income and well-being offer some guidance for policy purposes, even if a more thorough assessment demands more than such indicators alone can provide. The challenge for any persuasive evaluation lies not only in developing an adequate analytic approach, but also in realizing that the complex process of social change does not follow a uniform path and that it offers few guaranteed outcomes. It is difficult for policy communities to accept that social and economic development may not always enlarge the realm of human freedom, or that "development" may not always be identified with one version of modernity.

Despite the difficulties associated with evaluating progress, the dominant narrative concerning women's progress found in the publications of the main development institutions continues to make two assumptions that have long been problematized: that progress in equalizing gender relations is under way as part of an inevitable and *linear* process of modernization and development;[6] and that such progress is promoted principally by economic growth and, by extension, by the policies that are considered most able to secure that growth. The World Bank, in particular, claims that countries with higher levels of per capita gross domestic product (GDP) have greater gender equality, the policy implication being that the promotion of economic growth via liberalization is an important tool for closing gender gaps in well-being (Dollar and Gatti 1999; World Bank 2001).[7] In the following section we examine these claims.

6 See Inglehart and Norris (2003:10) for a clear statement that "Modernization brings systematic, *predictable* changes in gender roles".

7 For a critique and discussion, see Beneria and Bisnath (2001).

II.A.

the positive story

There can be little doubt that, since the First World Conference on Women in 1975 there have been significant changes, many of them positive, in the social and economic status of women. In rough averages, on all the key indicators there has been progress towards greater sex equality. Girls' enrolment in primary and secondary education has increased rapidly the world over, sharply reducing or closing, and in some cases reversing, the gender gap in school attendance (UNESCO 2003; see figure 1 for data on lower-income countries). Female illiteracy has also declined, and more women are gaining access to higher levels of education. Women's longevity has increased in most countries and their health indicators continue to improve. The decline in fertility and increased use of contraception in many developing countries has both reduced the risk of maternal mortality and eased the burden of unpaid care work, which invariably falls to women and girls. With a few exceptions, the presence of women in public life has also grown in all countries, whether in politics (see figure 2 for women's representation in parliamentary seats), in the workforce (see figure 3), or in the migrant streams that cross international borders (Boyd and Pikkov 2005; Yamanaka and Piper 2006).

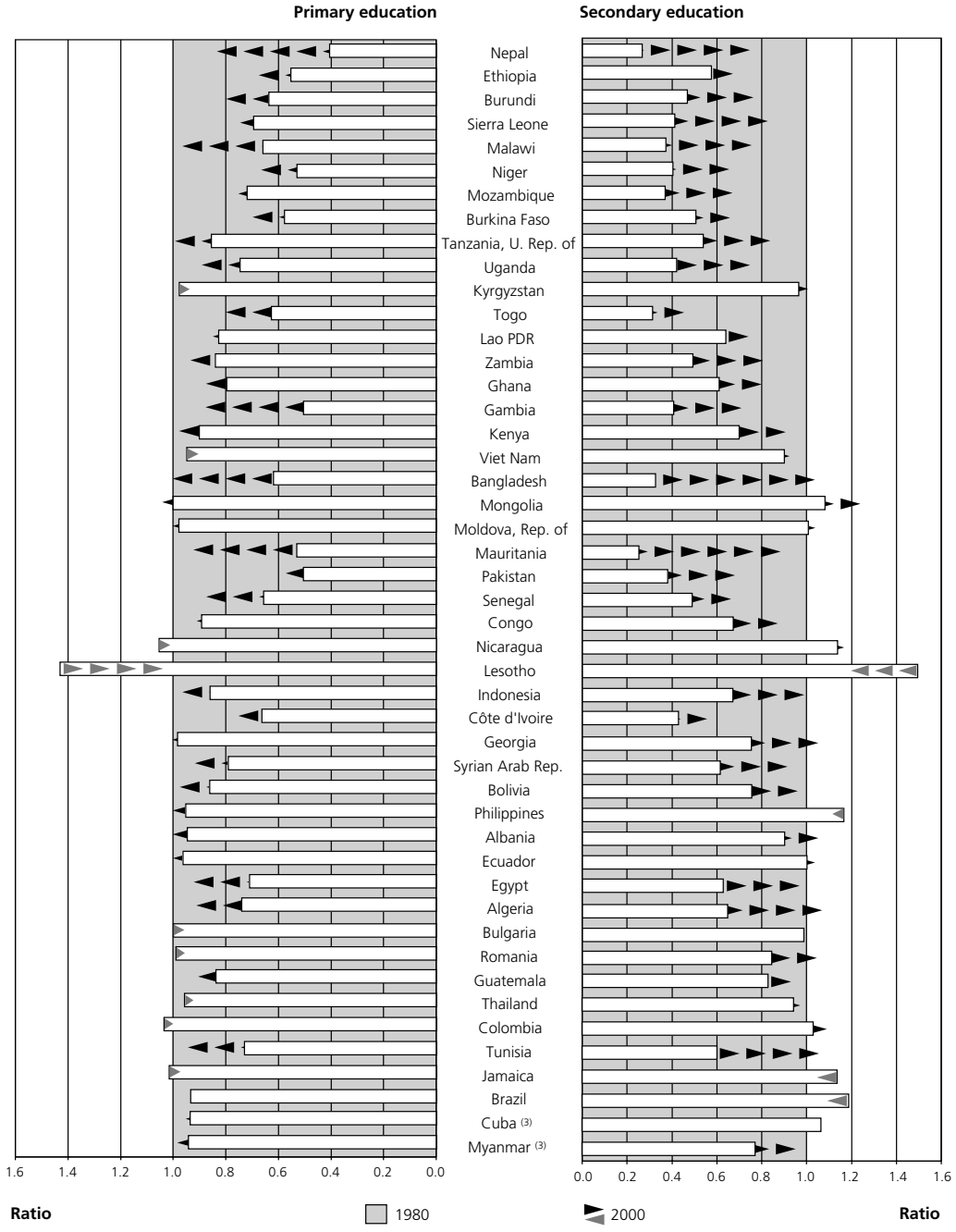
These changes are welcome if they enlarge women's realm of positive freedom and allow them to develop their capabilities to the full. Few would doubt that women's access to the public spheres of work and politics is a step in the direction of greater gender equality or that this has the potential to increase well-being. However, there are several important qualifications regarding these indicators of progress. First, there is considerable variation among countries in the progress achieved and, overall, it has been slower than at least some observers expected; second, even where women have progressed on some indicators, this has been accompanied by a persistence of gender inequalities, and in some cases a deepening of the gender divide. In other words, gender inequality and gender segregation can be highly resistant to changes in women's occupational and educational status. Third, the positive trends that are shown by the data are also in many cases accompanied by *negative* ones, some of these appearing as unanticipated consequences of the broader processes of change. Taken together, as we shall see, they make assessments of progress for women more ambivalent.

II.B.

two steps forward, one step back?

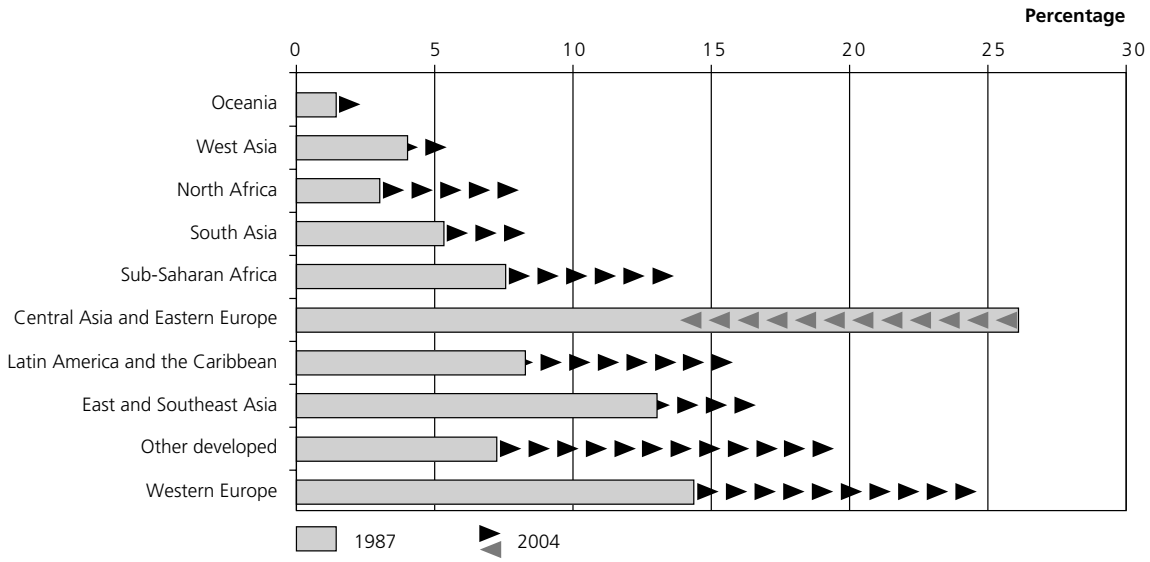
Gender inequalities have reduced over time but they have also proved to be remarkably resilient in the face of change. It is not surprising that, despite the greater presence of girls and women in public life, gender segregation and inequality have only slowly eroded, or have taken new forms. Moreover, some areas of public life have remained resistant, or have become *more* resistant to a female presence. This may be a temporary setback, as occurred in the Hadramaut region of Yemen, where female enrolment rates in schools rose in the 1970s and

FIGURE 1
RATIO OF FEMALE TO MALE GROSS ENROLMENT RATES[1] IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES AND LOWER-MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES[2] (1980–2000)



Notes: (1) A value of 1 for the ratio indicates equal enrolment ratios of females and males. A value below 1 indicates that the rates of female enrolment are lower than male enrolment rates. (2) Only countries for which data on secondary education was available for 1980 and 2000 are included. Countries are ordered in ascending order according to their 2000 gross national income (GNI) per capita (Atlas method, US$). (3) Data for GNI per capita not available.
Source: Calculated from World Bank 2004.

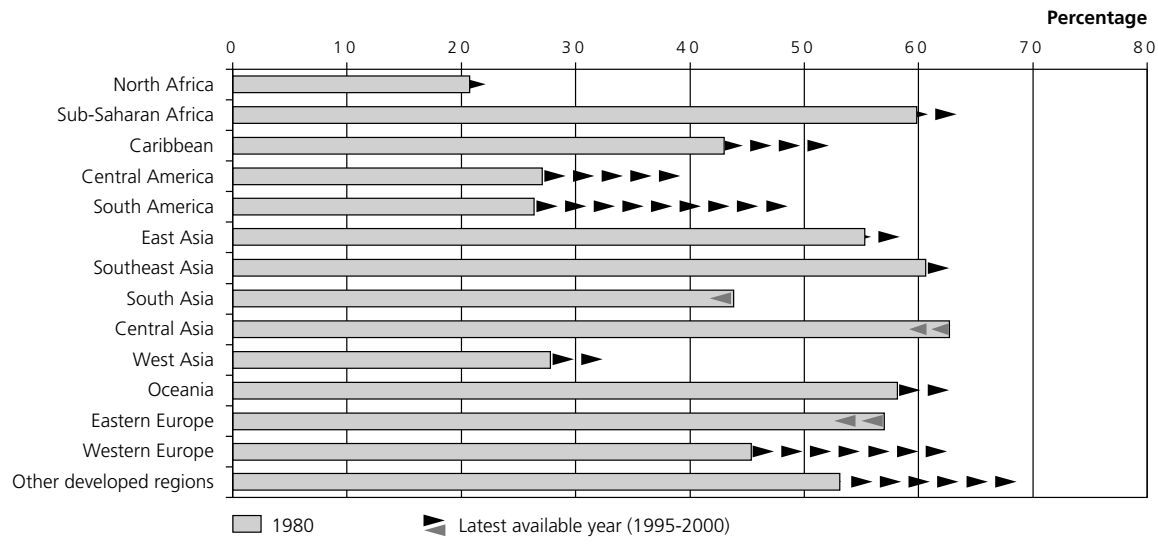
FIGURE 2
WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS, REGIONAL AVERAGES (1987–2004)



Source: Calculated from IPU 2004; UN Statistical Division 2004; UN 2003.

fell sharply in the 1980s as returnee migrants from Saudi Arabia chose to take their girls out of school as a mark of social status and religious deference. Although there have been improvements in girls' access to higher

FIGURE 3
FEMALE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY RATES, REGIONAL AVERAGES (1980–LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR)



Source: Calculated from ILO 2003.

education, in many developing countries the gender balance still favours boys (UNESCO 2003). Labour market discrimination often means that women are in practice required to have higher levels of education than men to compete in the workforce on equal terms. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reported in 1995 that women needed to have four more years of schooling in order to compete for salaries similar to those earned by men (Arriagada 1998).

The increased presence of women in formal political institutions and elected assemblies is an area where some advances have occurred, in part as a result of affirmative action, such as quota laws. Although the average proportion of women in national assemblies almost doubled between 1995 and 2004, at an aggregate level, there is still a very long way to go before anything resembling parity can be reached: only 16 per cent of national political representatives are now women. Moreover, enthusiasm for the greater show of female hands in representative bodies is tempered by the recognition that entrenched male biases and hierarchies still exist in political life. Women's opportunities to participate in leadership roles are greater at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy and in less powerful and less prestigious government agencies.

A salutary reminder of how easily efforts to increase women's participation in the public sphere can be reversed comes from the ex-socialist states in Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia. In these countries, women's share of seats in national legislatures plummeted by 50 per cent after 1989 (see figure 2), when previous communist party quotas for women were dropped. Employment and economic activity rates also declined sharply after 1990, with the mass disappearance of jobs affecting women disproportionately, especially those with low labour market qualifications and from minority or migrant populations, such as the Roma in Hungary (Fodor 2004; Laky 2004).

As in the domain of politics, in the world of work the narrowing of the gender gap has not produced gender equality. Moreover, it conceals marked asymmetries in pay and status due in part to continuing occupational segregation. While female activity rates have gone up in the formal sector in many countries, they seem to be concentrated in jobs with low pay and low authority levels, placing limits on women's overall access to income, status and power. Recent research finds that despite some improvements in the 1990s, levels of gender segregation in the labour market remain high throughout the world (Anker 1998; Anker et al. 2003). Women tend to congregate in relatively low-paid and low-status work at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, and they also tend to have little job security. The gender segmentation of labour markets seems to be a near-universal feature of economic life, as is reflected in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, where women's rate of labour force participation is nearing men's, but where gender differences persist in terms of labour market status and earnings (Orloff 2002).[8]

8 This is in part because many women work part-time; but there are also significant earning gaps among full-time workers (see UNRISD 2005:Table 5.1).

Meanwhile, survey after survey shows that the division of labour in the private sphere has either not altered or has altered only slightly in favour of women, even in socially egalitarian countries like Sweden where paternal leave provisions mandate a portion of parental leave for fathers (Bergman and Hobson 2002).[9] Yet it is women who retain principal responsibility for family care and domestic work throughout their lives, even when (as is often the case) married women and women with children are also in some form of paid work throughout their active years.

The ambivalent nature of progress is perhaps illustrated most strikingly in the "feminization" of the labour force (Standing 1999). While women's access to paid work has increased in most countries in the last two decades, and women have gained access to the cash economy and some potential for greater autonomy, the terms and conditions of much of the work on offer have deteriorated. The growth of informal work across the world, along with the casualization of formal sector employment, has allowed employers to lower labour costs and to sidestep social security obligations and labour laws. For many workers, both female and male, the outcome has been an increasing precariousness of jobs and greater insecurity of livelihoods. Informal employment tends to be a greater source of employment for women than for men in all developing regions, except North Africa (ILO 2002), with women's hourly earnings typically falling below those of men in identical employment categories, especially in the case of own-account workers (Heintz 2005). Simple wage ratios (average female wages as a percentage of average male wages) indicate that gender wage gaps have narrowed in many countries: the most extensive internationally comparable data sets are for the manufacturing sector, and these data indicate that the ratio of female to male wages has risen in a number of developing countries.[10] These data, however, are likely to overstate the ratio, since labour surveys that generate such data are often limited to larger enterprises; smaller firms that subcontract and pay low wages are thus likely to be excluded. Nevertheless, even on the basis of these data, declines in wage ratios are evident in some Latin American countries as well as in Hong Kong.

Deepening social divisions tend to accompany economic development, and data from recent decades show a growing gap between rich and poor households (Cornia et al. 2004; Milanovic 2003) in many countries, both developed and developing. Such trends imply growing inequalities among women, as those in the better paid jobs come to rely increasingly on the domestic support provided by those at the bottom of the pay scales. It also underlines the point, repeatedly made in gender analysis, that women do not constitute a homogeneous group, which in turn raises complex questions about interest representation in the political process. How can elite women in politics act as effective representatives of the interests of less advantaged women? What mechanisms are needed for constituency building and for holding women representatives accountable to those women on whose behalf they claim to speak? It may be too soon to expect women in politics to make a significant impact on policies. As newcomers to public office, women representatives need time and much support from women's movements and NGOs before they can become effective advocates of women's rights—a counter-cultural agenda that is likely to face resistance in mainstream political institutions. But there are also concerns that the means that women are using to reach political office are likely to influence their willingness to promote proposals for gender equality once in office. For example, the system of proportional representation, which works best for getting women elected once parties have adopted quotas for women, tends to breed loyalty to a party rather than the constituency, and at its worst, it can leave women representatives beholden to party bosses (Goetz and Hassim 2002; Macaulay 2005).

9 One would have expected a steep rise in the use of parental leave by men due to this policy, since families lose the paternal leave if the father does not take it. Throughout the 1990s, between 10 and 12 per cent of days were taken by fathers. In 2002, men's share rose to 15 per cent, still far short of the equal participation of men in unpaid work (Bergman and Hobson 2002).

10 See UNRISD (2005:Table 3.2), calculated from ILO (2004).

If these are some of the persisting inequalities, what of the unintended consequences of development? Unilinear accounts of progress tend to focus on broad trends and therefore fail to capture some of the contradictory effects of development processes. For example, while declining fertility continues to improve women's life chances in their reproductive years in most countries of the world, in some it has been associated with an increase in artificially high ratios of males to females (sex ratios) in the population.[11] Sex ratio imbalances have deepened in societies with marked "son preference" in tandem with rapid fertility decline, as infant daughters are subjected to maltreatment, neglect and abandonment, and new technologies allow sex-selective biases against females (Das Gupta and Bhat 1998; Jackson and Rao 2004). The most recent estimates of "missing women" (Sen 1990)—those missing as a result of the unequal treatment of males and females—show that the number has increased in absolute terms, even though it has fallen as a share of the number of women alive (Klasen and Wink 2003). China and India account for nearly 80 per cent of all "missing women" in the world. The fact that these two countries have also produced some of the fastest rates of economic growth over the past decade or so only serves to underline the point that there is no guarantee that growth will enhance gender equality. This assumption, as we will see in the following section, is one that repays close attention.

11 Because the female human being is more biologically robust, there is normally a higher ratio of women to men in any population. However, in certain societies where son preference is marked, human intervention in the form of girl neglect favours the survival of males (Das Gupta and Bhat 1998; Jackson and Rao 2004; Klasen and Wink 2003).

III.

growth and gender equality

Despite some greater appreciation of the multi-causal nature of social change, an assumption which underlies much policy thinking is that economic growth is the principal motor of change in gender relations. While it would be absurd to deny that the social transformations that have impacted on women's lives are associated with economic development, they are not simply a by-product of economic growth. As Inglehart and Norris (2003) show in their survey and analysis of global trends in gender equality, countries with similar per capita incomes—such as Sweden and the Gulf states of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—show marked disparities in women's rights and status. Female employment rates are also subject to considerable variations, ones which do not always correlate with gross domestic product, with the lowest rates recorded for the Middle East and North Africa. In political life too, there are interesting comparisons to be made: women in India and South Africa have made remarkable strides in gaining access to political office, while the United States, Japan, France and some other European countries have lagged behind.

Among the many factors that initiate or accelerate change in women's social and economic status is purposive action, working through state reforms and social movements. This is evident if we consider the last decades of the twentieth century, which were particularly significant for the gains that were made in international policy relating to women. The momentum of second-wave feminism and the efforts of the international humanitarian and development institutions combined to bring about significant changes in women's rights. By the early 1990s, most states had signed up to the Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and commitments were made to remove obstacles to women's equality. This period was marked by a series of political transformations that included a transition from authoritarian rule in many parts of the world, the collapse of "state socialism" in Eastern and Central Europe and, in the major industrialized countries, the presence in power of administrations that were supportive of some elements of the women's agenda. This political context helped to promote shifts in the international policy agenda towards a greater emphasis on the importance of democracy and human rights for development policy, with positive implications for women's rights agendas.

Women's movements, both national and transnational, took advantage of the changed political context (which they themselves had helped reshape) to advance women's rights, working both inside and outside state machineries for legislative and policy reforms. Faced with a window of opportunity, they were able to forge effective alliances with other political forces of all kinds: popular movements, parties and governments. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement of the 1990s was in bringing issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, violence against women, and inequality of power in gender relations to the centre of global and national debates on human rights and human development (Sen 2005). The transnational mobilization of women had a noticeable impact on global rule-making. Indeed, the body of UN conventions, especially CEDAW, and other international and regional legal instruments promoting gender equality, have undermined the legitimacy of patriarchy, while the social effects of female education, later marriages and labour market openings are combining to erode its remaining supports (Therbörn 2004).

If the 1990s saw women's movements achieve some of their historic demands, and if there was, in broad terms, progress in education, employment and political representation, were these positive outcomes assisted by a *favourable* economic environment, as the World Bank claims? More generally, it may be asked, what contribution

might development policy make to bringing about favourable or unfavourable conditions for achieving greater gender equality? In particular, has the policy model that has prevailed in recent decades, preoccupied as it is with balanced budgets and free markets, made it easier or more difficult to promote social equality, and to redress inequalities between women and men?

III.A.

neoliberalism and "managed market approaches"

There is considerable and ongoing debate over the record of the New Economic Model in reducing poverty and promoting growth, but most analysts agree that it has been associated in most parts of the world with deepening inequality (Cornia et al. 2004; Milanovic 2003; Wade 2001) and sluggish growth. In the 1980s and 1990s, stabilization and structural adjustment left many millions of people unemployed and in acute poverty, creating a widespread distrust of market reforms. The policies responsible for the high social costs and for the deepening inequalities have been shown to have had specific gender effects, shifting the burden of adjustment onto women in particular as "shock absorbers" and carers of last resort for households on the edge of survival (Elson 2002). The recessive shocks that accompanied stabilization measures had predictable consequences for employment and public services on which many women depend. In the absence of adequate safety nets, the livelihoods of low-income households in both rural and urban contexts were often placed under severe stress. Insecurity became a widespread feature of daily life even for the most protected public sector workers such as teachers, nurses and civil servants, many of whom were forced to make regular forays into the informal economy to supplement their dwindling incomes (Bangura 1994; Tsikata 2004). In the "scramble for cash" (Bryceson 1999) and under conditions of economic hardship, low-income women became increasingly visible as casual labourers in the agricultural sector, in the over-crowded urban informal economy, and as migrants from countryside to town and across international borders (Deere 2005; Lund 2004; Tsikata 2004; Whitehead 2004).

Meanwhile, the creeping commercialization and cost of welfare services often meant that poorer households had to adjust by shifting more of the care into the household and onto the shoulders of women and girls; the increased monetary cost of health services meant that women could less frequently afford to use such services for themselves and their children (Mackintosh and Tibandebage 2004). Markets—not as they are hypothesized to function in neoliberal economics, but as they are embedded (Polanyi 1957) or made operative through the interaction of real social groups (Hewitt de Alcántara 1993)—were powerful drivers of inequality, social exclusion and discrimination against women, whose unpaid care work held the social fabric together without recognition or reward.

As researchers documented the social impacts of macroeconomic policies, more sober accounts of global developments emerged, especially after the Russian and Asian financial crises of 1997, which underscored the fragility of an international order based on unregulated financial flows. By 2000, when the "Plus Five" reviews of the UN's global conferences of 1995 took place, there was much less certainty that neoliberal globalization would deliver on its promise to improve people's lives. While inflation was brought under control in many countries, price stability was achieved at the expense of growth and job creation. Financial crises and economic volatility were more frequent, with predictable economic and social consequences. Income inequalities had widened all

over the world, and fiscal deficits continued as governments faced severe difficulties in raising revenues to finance infrastructure, social services and other redistributive measures to compensate for the severe exclusions and failures of market-led growth.

As faith in market solutions waned in the 1990s, debates over alternatives revived and attention began to focus on real economies and their management. The neoliberal policy agenda has not been as hegemonic as some of its advocates—and critics—would like to believe. Economic restructuring has never been smooth or uncontested, and there have always been spaces for policy experimentation and heterodoxy, whether with respect to macroeconomic policies or social policies. An important part of the research commissioned by UNRISD for the B+10 report was into "managed market approaches" and their gender implications (UNRISD 2005:26).[12] Among those that have pursued these approaches are several Asian economies, notably China, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan Province of China and, to a lesser extent India and Malaysia. Their macroeconomic approaches are often referred to as "heterodox"; that is, governments have exhibited a willingness to intervene strategically and to regulate markets in order to promote development and growth. There is no "one size fits all" formula, and there have been interventions, to varying degrees, to regulate exchange rates, financial flows, trade and foreign direct investment. Some, especially the northeast Asian economies, have achieved impressive rates of growth as well as significant reductions in poverty and in inequalities between social classes and households. The UNRISD report notes, however, that this approach came under increasing strain in the 1990s, especially after the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

While many of these economies have seen a rapid increase in female employment, women were concentrated in the labour-intensive export industries, where low wages have been shown to be important in gaining market share (Cho et al. 2004; Hsiung 1996; Seguino 2000a, 2000b). In other words, women's low wages in export industries effectively generated the foreign exchange with which to purchase technologies and capital goods—what Seguino (2005) calls the "feminization of foreign exchange". At the same time, there was little positive impact in terms of narrowing gender gaps, notably in wages, but in other variables as well. Indeed, by 2000, despite 45 years of spectacular growth and industrial transformation, women's wages relative to men's, in Taiwan Province of China and the Republic of Korea, for example, were a mere 55 per cent. Seguino (2000a) argues that the success of the East Asian "tigers" can be partly attributed to such gaps. Hence, while this type of growth process may have resulted in some increase in women's absolute well-being and may have had beneficial social effects, *it did not provide the conditions for reducing gender inequality*.

The UNRISD report underlines the need for a healthy mix of policy instruments to be able to meet the sometimes conflicting ends of *production, distribution and social protection,* and their gendered demands and implications (UNRISD 2005:58–60). While any proposal for alternatives must eschew prescribing a "one size fits all" solution in the manner that orthodox approaches have done, there are some guiding principles that macroeconomic policies need to observe: avoiding deflationary policies that sacrifice growth and employment creation; placing equality as a central objective at the heart of policy-making, along with macroeconomic

12 This is shorthand for the unorthodox development policies pursued by a number of countries, especially in East Asia. There is a rich literature on these country experiences, which includes the work of Alice Amsden (1989), Ha-Joon Chang (1994), Robert Wade (1990) and Meredith Woo-Cumings (1999), among others.

stability; and ensuring affinities and complementarities between macro and sectoral policies. As Amartya Sen (1999:141) has put it:

> Financial conservatism has good rationale and imposes strong requirements, but its demands must be interpreted in the light of overall objectives of public policy. The role of public expenditure in generating and guaranteeing many basic capabilities calls for attention; it must be considered along with the instrumental need for macroeconomic stability. Indeed, the latter need must be assessed within a broader framework of social objectives.

III.B.

changing policy and political agendas

So far, we have argued that the record of achievement regarding gender equality is more ambivalent, and the causal influences more diverse and less unidirectional, than is sometimes assumed. We have also argued that development policies have an important role to play in securing outcomes and that the first phase of the structural reforms was in many respects negative for women. In the 10 years since the Beijing conference, there have been some significant shifts in international development policy, along with a growing appreciation of the need to develop gender-aware policies. By the end of the 1980s, "market fundamentalism" and shock therapy had lost much of their appeal, opening up a space for new ideas and approaches in development policy and practice.

Growing discontent over the social effects of the reforms, as well as criticism from leading economists in the international financial institutions (IFIs), played their part in bringing about a policy shift, which is sometimes referred to as the "post-Washington Consensus".[13] These new policies showed a willingness to give social and political concerns greater attention, expressed under indicative headings such as "participation", "social capital" and "good governance". The state was partially rehabilitated as a significant actor in development, and the emphasis was placed on good governance through democracy, participation, decentralization and community ownership. However, while these changes may have led to a degree of mutual accommodation between the IFIs and their critics, and rendered the reforms more palatable, many of the latter's central policy tenets remain in place. The dominant policy package retains the core elements of economic orthodoxy: trade and financial liberalization, and tight monetary and fiscal policies. It would thus be more accurate to speak of a new "moment" in the neoliberal agenda, rather than of a new paradigm (Molyneux 2002; Molyneux forthcoming).

These and other developments over the decade since Beijing required new ways of thinking, working and framing priorities. To this was added the changed political climate following the US elections and the attacks of 11 September 2001. While the first saw the adoption by the United States of conservative policies with respect to women's reproductive and sexual rights, the latter focused more attention and funding on "security"

13 Since then, arguably, we should speak of a "post-post Washington *non* – consensus".

at the expense of development and human rights. The last decade has also seen conservative coalitions—popular, governmental and faith-based—become more effective in developing strategies and building alliances to oppose feminist agendas. Globalization has, meanwhile, proceeded apace under the banner of trade liberalization, while regionalization has generated new legal and policy mechanisms, and called forth new political alignments and new social movements.

In the decade since the Platform for Action was produced, women's movements and policy coalitions have focused their attention on some of the developments in policy and in international politics that have accompanied the post-adjustment policy package. These are social policy and the new anti-poverty programmes; the good governance agenda; decentralization; identity politics and diversity; conflict; and economic justice. We will discuss each of these briefly in turn.

SOCIAL POLICY AND POVERTY

Social policy and, in particular, poverty relief, moved up the scale of international priorities in the 1990s. The reduction of extreme poverty by half by 2015 is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals, and anti-poverty programmes have proliferated in developing countries, as donors have adopted various forms of social conditionality to promote poverty reduction. At the same time, female poverty has acquired more policy attention, with mothers in particular qualifying for targeted assistance. One of the priority areas identified at Beijing was female poverty, and the current policy emphasis has been welcomed in view of the size of the "gender deficit". However, there are some issues raised by these programmes. The first is whether such responses are desirable or adequate (Razavi 1999). The scale of poverty relief might be read as a testimony to the failure of development policy, and there are serious concerns over whether sustainable routes out of poverty are being provided or can be provided in the absence of appropriate job creation measures and regional regeneration (Molyneux forthcoming).

Second, behind the apparent consensus forged by a shared vocabulary of "poverty" and "social protection", there are conflicting understandings of social policy based on different values, priorities and understandings of state responsibility (Razavi 2004). In the social risk management framework, which is the prevailing approach, the state is charged only with providing social safety nets for risk coping, as well as risk management instruments where the private sector fails. This approach is effectively a continuation of the earlier policy of minimal safety nets, and overrides equality agendas which are redistributive and universalist. As women have the greater share of responsibility for unpaid care work as well as for management of household resources, and less advantageous access to cash and income-earning opportunities, the shrinking of state responsibility and the greater role given to market forces will impact adversely on their time and on their access to social benefits. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, the gendered implications of welfare reform have been particularly acute in the context of health sector reforms, which have adversely affected women's access to and utilization of health services. The impact has fallen on women as users of health care services (for themselves and their dependants); on women as health sector workers in terms of working conditions; and on women as providers of unpaid care, especially when formal mechanisms remain out of reach (Mackintosh and Tibandebage, 2004). In many middle-income countries where the reform of public pension programmes has favoured privatization, the implications for most women have been dire. Given that pension benefits in fully privatized systems correspond closely to the overall

"contributions" made by the insured person, and that women typically earn less money and work for fewer years than men, the result is that women receive considerably lower benefits; and since women's higher life expectancy is taken into account in most private systems, women's benefits are further depressed in relative terms (Huber and Stephens 2000; Steinhilber 2004).

Feminists have historically supported the creation and maintenance of welfare state forms premised on the centrality of redistribution, equality and universal social provision. This model materialized in parts of Europe, but forms of social state have also evolved in some Latin American and some Southeast Asian countries, among others. Recent adaptations and reforms may have diluted those principles, but they have not fundamentally overturned them (Razavi and Hassim 2006). The goals of inclusion and universal social provision are being pursued in some developing countries, where there has been considerable public debate about social responsibility and where an ideological commitment to social equality remains in force. Despite deep social inequalities in countries like Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and South Africa, efforts are being made to extend social protection mechanisms to people in rural areas and in informal work situations (Lund 2004).

The third concern is that anti-poverty programmes often rely on women's unpaid or poorly paid work to fulfil their objectives. Making women more visible to policy makers is not necessarily a step forward if women are instrumentalized through their caring and mothering roles, and if no account is taken of their own needs. Women in low-income households are often engaged in resource generation, albeit in less-than-favourable conditions; they need training and better opportunities than are provided in most programmes, where they are located chiefly as the provider of care to others. The debate over the new social policy and over the poverty agenda has only just begun, but it is of such central concern to women's lives that it will remain a priority area for women activists and policy makers for the foreseeable future.

"GOOD GOVERNANCE" REFORMS AND THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

An emphasis on "good governance" has been an integral part of both the Washington Consensus and the post-Washington Consensus. But the governance agenda has had both a mixed reception and a mixed record in those countries where it has driven donor and government policy. The existence of formal democratic rules and the protection of civil and political rights are preconditions of virtually any kind of critical engagement with the state by social forces pressing for reform. Women's movements are no exception. Women's mobilization was essential to the success of many pro-democracy movements, especially when conventional channels for popular expression (political parties, trade unions) were closed to political activists (Alvarez 1990). However, mobilization in opposition to authoritarian rule has not always secured women's representation in formal institutional politics after the transition, especially where transitions have been sudden, or where they are the outcome of negotiations between exclusive or elite groups.

While many countries have now formally become democracies with established institutions of representative government, the degree to which democracy has been consolidated varies, along with its institutional forms. Even where elections have been held, political parties often remain elitist and weakly institutionalized; mechanisms for popular participation are not embedded in society, and the implementation of law and order rarely succeeds

in protecting the civil rights accorded to citizens, especially those who are socially marginalized. There are increasing concerns about the resurgence of semi-authoritarian states, "soft dictatorships" and "masculine democracies" (Eisenstein 1993; O'Donnell 1993, 1998). Even where high-level political commitment to women's rights exists—in terms of constitutional provisions and key policy statements—the translation of these provisions into actual government policy, targeted spending, and effective procedures for bureaucrats and service delivery agents is far from guaranteed.

The connection between political commitments and effective policy implementation defines what is meant by "governance". The difficulties that women have experienced in promoting gender-equity legislation, and in seeing it passed into law and implemented, would indicate that women have a keen interest in seeing the capacity and accountability of the state strengthened (Goetz 2004). The fact that governance reforms are now high on the agenda of many multilateral and bilateral donor agencies therefore seems to offer an important entry point for addressing gender-specific capacity and accountability failures. Ways of doing this include addressing gender biases in public expenditure management systems, enhancing gender equality in the staffing of public institutions such as the civil service or the judiciary, and facilitating rule of law reforms that secure women's access to assets and ensure that instances of abuse and violence against them can be prosecuted (Goetz 2004).

A broad understanding of a "good governance" agenda would embrace political liberalization, participation and human rights, and would address problems of social inequality as part of a fundamental commitment to democracy. Such an agenda would encompass the kinds of issues of state legitimacy, capacity and accountability that social movements and women's movements have confronted for decades. With such an agenda in mind, governance reforms with their aim of enhancing the capacity of the state and making it more accountable to its citizens have been welcomed in many parts of the world. Critics, however, point out that although governance reforms can and should address issues of government legitimacy and the public participation of socially excluded groups, they have in fact been dominated by a much narrower preoccupation. This centres on the "sound" management of the economy along neoliberal lines, and on expanding private property rights in order to support economic activity (Mkandawire 2004). When these are the main parameters of "good governance", gender equality has typically been excluded from the concerns of the reformers and from their reforms (Nyamu-Musembi 2005).

Some of the reforms may indeed have adverse implications for women. The case of land tenure reform, which is of critical importance both to the investment environment and to the livelihoods of rural people, illustrates the problem. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, land is held and used under plural legal arrangements. The fixation with the market advantages of formal titling and individual ownership rights, however, risks eroding women's socially sanctioned claims to land, as historical evidence from countries such as Kenya illustrates (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003).

DECENTRALIZATION

Good governance reforms have encouraged the decentralization of political power to local government bodies, municipalities and village councils. The emphasis on bringing government "closer to people" resonates with the "local democracy" initiatives that many NGOs and social movements have long championed. In some countries, women's representation in local government has been facilitated through quotas, which have given large numbers of women their first experience of political office: the 30 per cent quota for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions in India is the best-known example.

Once in office, however, the willingness and capacity of women representatives to press for gender-equality initiatives is critically dependent on the support that they receive from women's movements and NGOs. In very unequal societies, there is always the risk that elites, usually men, will "capture" the available power in replacement or new institutions, reducing the prospect that women's presence in political office will significantly influence programmes and spending patterns. Where decentralization additionally involves conferring power on "traditional" authorities, such as tribal elders or religious councils, the invocation of tradition and custom may be deeply inimical to women's interests. This raises fundamental questions about the extent to which local government bodies will be based on democratic principles and practices, and how they will themselves contribute to the consolidation of democracy or to its reversal (Beall 2005).

Hence, while the recent donor attention to the question of "good governance" is to be welcomed, much depends on how it is interpreted. A great deal depends on whether the democratization of politics and the participation of marginalized social groups are seen as integral to reform objectives and are embraced in institutional change; and on whether the reduction of both social and gender inequalities is among the core principles guiding the programme of state institutional transformation.

THE RESURGENCE OF IDENTITY POLITICS

A phenomenon which has emerged with particular force in recent years is that of "identity politics". The term refers to those movements that mobilize around ethnic, racial and religious identities, and often contest long-standing histories of marginalization and discrimination by mainstream institutions and cultures. In response to such claims, many states have put in place constitutional and legal provisions and institutional mechanisms to accommodate ethnic, racial and other diversities.

While there have been tensions between some versions of identity-based claims and notions of gender equality (the latter based on universalist principles), these are not necessarily irreconcilable, at least in principle (Molyneux and Razavi 2002; Phillips 2002). For example, international legislation granting rights to indigenous peoples and their cultures (ILO Convention 169) stipulates that customary law should be respected when it does not conflict with universal human rights. This formulation has been incorporated into a number of state constitutions, especially in Latin America in the 1990s (Hernandez Castillo 2002). In practice, however, women who are active in these movements often find it difficult to get a hearing for gender equality concerns, an experience that resonates with women who have been active in nationalist movements.

More radical attacks on human rights and women's rights agendas have also resulted from the resurgence of religious identities that include the assertion of "traditional" gender roles and systems of authority that intrinsically violate women's rights. The most extreme example of women's oppression, designated "gender cleansing" by some commentators, was pursued by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. This is not the only case of its kind: the Islamist movement that captured state power in Iran in 1979 based its grievances against the monarchy and the United States, and its own system of government (the "governance of the jurisprudence" or *velayat faqih*), on a highly patriarchal interpretation of Islam. Subsequent social and gender restructuring led to state and domestic violence against women, violated women's rights with impunity, and had a lasting impact on gender relations and society (Paidar 2001). However, since women are a visible political force in the country, both as individuals and as a social group, doctrinaire positions on women's rights and many early Islamization measures have been renegotiated or reformed through the efforts of women's rights advocates both inside and outside parliament.

Some faith-based movements gather members from among those feeling humiliated and powerless in the face of unacceptable behaviour by their own state or by foreign powers. Grievances and dislocations are also fuelled by development policies and outcomes that exacerbate people's experience of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. A deeper analysis of these movements would include a critique of "modernity" and an examination of backlashes against Western, consumerist and libertarian ideas which contribute to their ideological predispositions. From a gender perspective, their appeal to women also needs to be probed: women are visible among both the membership and the leadership of many such movements even though they are not incorporated into formal power structures (Basu 2005). Women have been publicly active in some of them, and have assumed roles that violate traditional gender norms—for example, the militant Hindu nationalist women involved in inciting anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat, India, in 2002. Along with their conspicuous public engagement, a feature of women's involvement in these movements is their support for reforms that restrict women's rights and subjugate them to men in the name of religion and tradition, and in the expectation of respect and personal security.

The "traditions" and religious doctrines typically invoked by some of these movements may be neither traditional nor authentic, but may instead have been recently coined to serve political ends. Some women's rights advocates have therefore set out to provide alternative readings of religious texts supportive of gender-egalitarian practices. This has been one of the main thrusts of feminist activism in the Muslim world, where examining the rights of women under *Shari'a* law has been an acceptable terrain for discussion in some settings (Afshar 1998; Mir-Hosseini 2000). However, when religious authorities become the spokespeople for nations and ethnic communities, and where no guarantees exist for equality, democracy or human rights protection within the political context, there is very little scope for contestation and dialogue (Molyneux and Razavi 2002).

As is the case with Christianity and other religions, belief in Islam has been associated with a range of state forms and legal interpretations; modern Islamist movements are not uniformly hostile to women's rights. The moderate Justice and Development Party of Turkey is a case in point. In November 2002, the party acceded to power amidst fears that this would herald a retreat to conservative religious politics. However, the new government seems to have embraced secular democracy and rejected the orthodox interpretations of Islam practised by some of its supporters. In a move that was welcomed by many women's rights advocates in Turkey, the government's Directorate of Religious Affairs instructed the nation's *imams* (spiritual leaders) to turn their spiritual guidance to the arena of human rights and women's rights. Worshippers in different parts of the country are being told

that "honour killings", in which men murder female relatives suspected of tarnishing the family name, are not only a sin but are also against the law (WLUML 2004). Such messages conveyed by the *imams* can "reach people the human rights advocates often cannot—the 15 million men in Turkey who attend services every Friday" (Yakin Erturk, quoted in Collins 2004).

CONFLICT

The proliferation, since the end of the Cold War, of internal or civil wars, the hold-over conflicts from the post-colonial era and the major military incursions associated with the contemporary "war on terror" have important implications for women. In 2005, there were 19 major conflicts and many more small-scale violent confrontations ongoing in different parts of the world. When contrasting today's wars with those of previous generations, it is commonly noted that, whereas in the past 80 to 90 per cent of the casualties were military, today the same percentages are more likely to be civilians, of whom the majority are women and children.[14]

The 1990s saw wider recognition that armed conflict has gendered effects, and that a gender-sensitive approach to humanitarian law is important in conflict and post-conflict situations. One area of progress has been the increasing attention paid to gender-based violence, especially in the international legal framework governing armed conflict. The massive scale of gender-based crimes, and their systematic use as weapons of war in Bosnia and Rwanda, has prompted the international community into action. Both the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia were successful in establishing historic legal precedents and breaking new legal ground by prosecuting, for the first time, perpetrators of violence against women in wartime. Gender-based crimes are now also codified in humanitarian law in the International Criminal Court Statute (Walsh 2004). However, the majority of crimes against women during wartime still go unpunished, and women survivors of such human rights abuses are still stigmatized to a far greater degree than male survivors (Nowrojee 2005). In addition, there is still a large gap between the growing recognition of the gender dimensions of war and conflict and the practice of humanitarian aid, as well as in the design, implementation and funding of programmes to address the needs of women and girls, including refugee and displaced populations.

Moreover, the implications of modern forms of war for women in their socially constructed and livelihood roles have not been given similar attention. Women have been identified as "programmed for peace"—as instigators of peace initiatives or conflict resolution. This resonates with the idea of the quintessentially pacifying female presence. But women are still largely ignored in the formal negotiations that bring post-conflict institutions into being and they therefore lose out in peace settlements (Pankhurst 2003). The limited extent to which peace secures women's interests is an example of the neglect of gender considerations in public policy.

14 There is a relative paucity of sex-disaggregated data on the impacts of armed conflict. The difficulties in collecting data in any conflict zone mean that there are usually few dependable data at all. Statistics, such as those claiming that 80 per cent of camp populations are women and children, or that indirect deaths from war are in a ratio of nine-to-one to direct deaths, should be treated with caution (UNRISD 2005:211).

The destructive aftermath of war includes more quotidian forms of violence which persist after the conflict is over; in such contexts crime rates have soared, as have incidents of gender-based and sexual violence. To the trauma of conflict, with its detrimental impact on interpersonal relations and community networks, have been added breakdowns of law and order, of police and judicial systems, of health and education services, and a weakening of social and ethical norms (Commission on Human Security 2003; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). In "normal" times too, crime and violence seem to be on the increase. Urban populations have been witnessing a growth in the use of private security services, the rise of walled compounds and separated areas within cities, and a widespread lack of confidence in the police and justice systems (Caldeira 2000). Women's movements have begun to work on these issues, for example by promoting gender-aware-policing, setting up women's police stations and continuing to support refuges for victims of violence.

GLOBALIZATION: FORGING LINKS BETWEEN ECONOMIC POLICY AND GENDER JUSTICE

Securing livelihoods and creating an enabling economic environment are necessary preconditions for attaining gender equality and women's rights. But what is an "enabling economic environment", and how do women's movements position themselves in relation to the prevailing policies that drive economic globalization? To a significant degree, women's ability to achieve parity with men in access to resources and influence, and in well-being, depends on the vicissitudes of the global economic system, the macroeconomic policies and development strategies on which their livelihoods and ways of life, and those of their families and communities, ultimately depend. Policies aimed at trade and financial liberalization and global economic integration have profound impacts on the lives of women, and on those of their partners and other family members. A world in which the dominant policy model tends to deepen social and economic inequality and reinforce marginalization; in which redistribution has no place; and in which governments compromise the interests of their citizens to accommodate global forces, is not a world in which gender equality can be advanced, let alone secured.

For this reason, women's rights activists have been devoting more attention and energy to the larger structures of global power, and the evolution of problems of global injustice relating to macroeconomic trends: the implications for socially disadvantaged and discriminated groups of unregulated transnational capital flows, debt service payments, trade liberalization, inequitable trade patterns and the shrinkage of public resource expenditures on welfare needs. One example is the attempt to influence trade negotiations at the global level, which has required transnational feminist solidarity and organizing, as a complement to women's collective action at the national level (Mohanty 2003; Petchesky 2003). Gaining recognition of the need for a gender perspective in forums where macroeconomic discussion takes place is difficult, but a first step has been taken with the successful lobbying for gender budgets.

These links between global economic justice and women's rights have been made central to the global campaign for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, which constitutes one of the strongest and most organized global feminist networks. Transnational activism has been given impetus by the continuing concern over the harsh social impacts of neoliberal policies; the emergence of large transnational coalitions demonstrating against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and at G-8 summits and IFI gatherings; and the leadership of Southern women's groups whose work for sexual and reproductive health and rights has consistently been linked to a strong economic justice platform (Petchesky 2003).

III.C.

women's movements: confronting complex realities

The old and new challenges facing those committed to advancing gender justice require imaginative political strategies and new allies. Yet forging the political alliances—with governments, NGOs and social movements—to help bring the interdependence between global economic justice and gender justice to the awareness of policy makers, and then to realize gender-sensitive policy change, has proved difficult. In attempting to make an impact on global rule-making, those concerned with advancing gender justice have had to bring on board those governments and global institutions that are redesigning the architecture of the international political economy, and enlist the support of other social movements. Alliances with new and old social movements have been important in securing some gains, but have required careful negotiation. One of the promising developments of the 1990s was the emergence of new forms of organizing among women workers in the informal economy, as well as greater responsiveness among some older trade unions to women informal workers.

Not all organizations in the movement for global economic justice, however, are sensitive, interested and attentive to the gender-related aspects of the issues they address (Liebowitz 2004; Sen 2005). Where women's campaigns are detached from the broader social or economic justice issues, they may be limited in their efficacy. If progress towards the goal of gender equality has been uneven, this is as much due to the character and tactics of the forces that seek equality, as to the structures and practices through which gender inequalities are reproduced. The key question remains: How can women's organizations simultaneously tackle women's subordination and unequal access to resources, *and* confront the broader processes and policies that entrench inequalities between and within nation states?

The changed global political environment in which economic justice and gender justice have to be negotiated has thrown up new challenges. Some see a backlash against gender justice taking place, especially in some regions, but also in the global decision-making arenas. In the mid-1990s, the Vatican and some Islamic country delegations united against the adoption of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, and maintained persistent opposition to gender-equality proposals during subsequent conferences. While conservative religious groups were most vehement in their opposition to abortion and same-sex partnership, these positions were symptomatic of their core objection to gender equality itself. These tensions came to the fore in the "Plus Five" reviews for the Cairo and Beijing conferences (Sen and Correa 1999). Despite conflicts over women's rights, considerable advances were nevertheless possible on sexual and reproductive health and rights during the 1990s because of the limited control exercised by religious fundamentalists over state power. Both the Cairo Plus Five and Beijing Plus Five reviews ended with the gains of Cairo and Beijing intact, and with further progress on some key fronts.

Such positive outcomes were, however, hard won. Many women's organizations consider that in the current international climate, many of the gains won in the UN conferences, summits and special sessions of the 1990s could be fragile. Human rights, women's agendas and the entire multilateral framework within which the gains of the 1990s were made have been weakened by the current global political crisis occasioned by terrorism, militarism, the war on Iraq and the hostility to unilateralism. Human rights agendas have come under pressure not only in countries where democratic institutions remain weak, but also in the heartlands of democracy. In both North America and Europe there are concerns about the rights of ethnic minorities and immigrants, especially Muslim minorities. Fundamentalist extremism and terrorist acts have served to reinforce suspicion of Muslim populations in particular, who may be simplistically and erroneously branded as uniformly hostile to the West and to democratic values, especially in regard to gender issues.

However, as Gita Sen (2005) puts it, there is no "clash of civilizations" on women's rights and gender issues between the "neoconservatives" and religious conservatives. The last few years have seen the most powerful nation in the world join, and at times even replace, the Vatican in global negotiations as the key strategist against the women's agenda on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Under the 2000–2004 administration, the United States slashed aid budgets supporting contraception, and promoted abstinence and greater parental control over adolescents as the way to contain sexual freedom and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with tragic outcomes (Epstein 2005).

Governments have not, in the main, caved in to such pressures, as emerged in regional and sub-regional discussions around ICPD Plus Ten and Beijing Plus Ten. But there are fissures and tensions among those who have resisted such pressures. The attempt to create a strong bloc out of Southern governments to confront the economic North in trade negotiations gives hope of greater global economic justice;[15] but within the new alliance there is no common ground on sexual and reproductive health and rights, nor indeed on human rights more broadly. Women's organizations recognize that it is only by keeping up the pressure and by participating in the largely gender-blind arenas where global economic justice is debated that they have any chance of forging links between the issues of economic justice and gender justice.

Feminist research has an important part to play in debates over globalization by casting light on some of the processes—economic, political and social—that link gender and economic justice. In recent decades, the world has become more unequal as market-led policies have tightened their hold, and previously accepted values such as equality and redistribution have been sidelined. Many observers see prevailing policies—trade and financial liberalization, tight monetary and fiscal policies, market-based entitlements to welfare—as the main obstacles to the objectives that were agreed upon in the global conferences of the 1990s, including Beijing. Placing the various elements of the neoliberal reform programme under a gender lens, and examining their implications for equality and justice, can contribute to the debate over how gender equality, indeed social equality more generally, might best be advanced. If Beijing was a moment of optimism for what could be achieved to improve women's lives, Beijing Plus 10 signals the need for cautious reflection not only on the progress achieved, but on the obstacles in the way of further advancement.

15 Even though the positions adopted by the larger and more powerful developing countries (in trade negotiations for example) do not always reflect the interests of smaller and less developed countries.

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Printed in Switzerland
GE.06-0799-March 2006-1,500
UNRISD/OPGP15/06/5

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This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union, the Department for Research Co-operation of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida/SAREC), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Ottawa, Canada) and the government of the Netherlands. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of these donors or UNRISD.