

# Chapter 1 After Beijing: Uneven progress in an unequal world

Ten years on from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the question being posed by many women's organizations across the world is how much has been achieved in the past decade? For those involved in the search for gender equality this is an important question to ask, but by no means an easy one to answer.

The task of evaluating progress in gender equality poses many challenges. The standard indicators of income and well-being offer some guidance, but a proper and grounded assessment demands much more than they alone can provide. The challenge lies not only in developing an adequate analytical approach, but in understanding that the terms of engagement may themselves be questioned. What counts as progress is often a contested field in which there are competing visions of "the good society", and of women's place within it. The concept of progress has itself undergone revision and qualification, along with the realization that the complex process of social change does not follow a uniform path and offers few guaranteed outcomes. Social and economic development may not always enlarge the realm of human freedom, nor is the idea of "development" always, or simply, associated with one version of modernity.

These caveats notwithstanding, 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. 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. The decline in fertility 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. The presence of women in public life has also grown, whether in politics, in the workforce, or in the migrant streams that cross international borders.

Such changes in women's lives are associated with the social transformations that attend economic development, but they are not simply a by-product of economic growth. In many instances change in women's social position has been instigated or accelerated by state reforms and social movements. In this respect, the last decade of the 20th century was particularly significant. The period was marked by a series of political transformations that included the 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 context helped to promote shifts in the international policy agenda towards a greater emphasis on the importance of democracy and human rights for the development process.

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. The transnational

mobilization of women had a noticeable impact on global rule-making, as is evident from table 1.1. Indeed, some observers of long-term social change argue that the body of UN Conventions, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (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 pillars.

# THE PERSISTENCE OF GENDER INEQUALITIES

If the 1990s saw women achieve some of their historic demands, and if there was progress in education, employment and political representation, these positive outcomes must be qualified in the light of continuing gender inequalities and a less than favourable economic environment. In education for example, despite the advance in many countries towards

Table 1.1 Key international and regional legal instruments promoting gender equality (1990–2004)

Area of commitment	Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)  Adopted – 1989 Came into force – 1990	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families Adopted – 1990 Came into force – 2003	Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women Adopted – 1994 Came into force – 1995
Non-discrimination based on sex	Art. 2: "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind" (including gender).		Art. 6.a: "The right of women to be free from all forms of discrimination"
Elimination of violence against women	Art. 19.1: "States parties shall () protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence () including sexual abuse" Protocol (1) Art. 1: "States Parties shall prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography"	Art. 10: "No migrant worker or member of his or her family shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment"	Art. 1: "() violence against women shall be understood as any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere"  Art. 3: "Every woman has the right to be free from violence in both the public and private spheres"
Economic and social rights		Migrant workers (including migrant women) shall enjoy equality of treatment with nationals of the state concerned in relation to condition and terms of work (arts 25 and 54), social security (art. 27), access to education, health and social services (art. 43) courts and tribunals (art. 18).	Art. 5: "Every woman is entitled to the free and full exercise of her () economic, social and cultural rights, and may rely on the full protection of those rights as embodied in regional and international instruments on human rights"
Civil and political rights		Art. 26.1a: "States Parties recognizes the right of migrant workers and members of their families to take part in meetings () of trade unions and of any other associations () in the view to protecting their economic, social, cultural and other interests"	access to the public service of her country and to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including

Sources: United Nations Treaty Collection 2001; ILO 2002a; OAS 2000.

gender parity, notably at primary level, progress has been far slower than expected. At higher levels of education too, the gender balance in many developing countries still heavily favours boys, despite some change (see figure 1.1).<sup>2</sup>

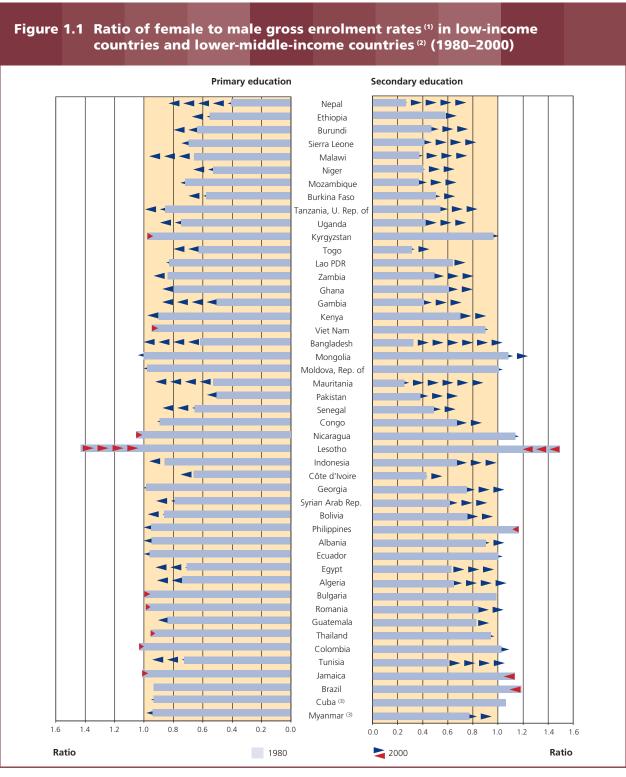
Despite the greater numerical presence of women in the world of work and in the domain of politics (see figures 1.2 and 1.3), the narrowing gender gap conceals marked gender asymmetries in pay and status. Women continued to be concentrated in jobs with low pay and authority levels,

placing limits on their overall access to income, status and power.

Table 1.1 Key international and regional legal instruments promoting gender (cont.) equality (1990–2004)

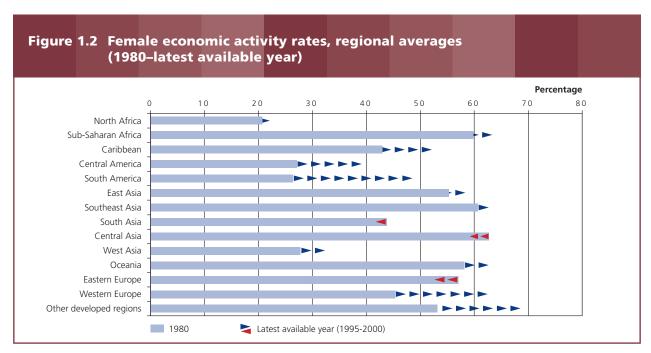
Home Work Convention	Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	United Nations Convention against Organized Crime and its Protocols	Area of commitment	
Adopted – 1996 Came into force – 2000	Adopted – 1998 Came into force – 2002	Adopted – 2000 Came into force – 2003		
Art 4.1: "The national policy on home work shall promote () equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners"			Non-discrimination based on sex	
	Arts. 7 and 8 define rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity as crimes against humanity and war crimes.	Protocol <sup>(2)</sup> Art. 2.a: "The purpose of this Protocol () to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, paying particular attention to women and children" Protocol <sup>(3)</sup> Art. 2: "The purpose of this Protocol is to prevent and combat the smuggling of migrants () while protecting the rights of the smuggled migrants" (including women).	Elimination of violence against women	
Art. 4 promotes equality of treatment in relation to: protection against discrimination in employment and occupation; in the field of occupational safety and health; remuneration; statutory social security protection; access to training; minimum age for admission to employment or work; and maternity protection.			Economic and social rights	
Art. 4 (2a): "Equality of treatment shall be promoted () in relation to the homeworkers' right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing and to participate in the activities of such organizations."			Civil and political rights	

otes: (1) Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (adopted in 2000); (2) Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (adopted in 2000); (3) Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (adopted in 2000).

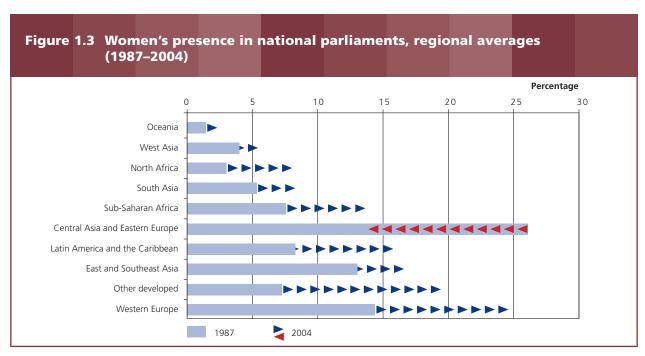


Notes: (1) A value of 1 for the ratio indicates equal enrolment ratios of females and males. A value below 1 indicates that the rates of female enrolment are lower than male enrolment rates. (2) Only countries for which data on secondary education was available for 1980 and 2000 are included. Countries 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 2004b.





Source: Calculated from ILO 2003.



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

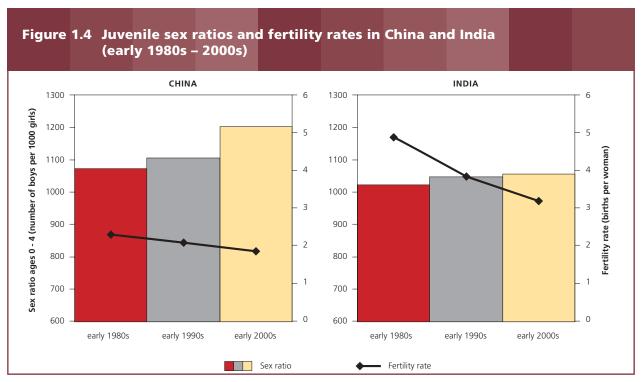
In many countries, both developed and developing, the gap between rich and poor households has been growing,3 which also means that there are increasing inequalities among women. While the World Bank claims that the global poverty rate has fallen from 32 to 25 per cent between 1990 and 1999, decreasing the number of poor from 1.3 billion to 1.1 billion, there are major controversies about the Bank's methods of measuring poverty. In particular, distortion is produced by including the special case of China, which offsets trends of constant or increasing poverty in a number of other regions.4 Although it is difficult to estimate gender differences in the incidence of poverty, given that income is most often measured at the household level (which ignores how resources are distributed within the household), it is reasonable to assume that women constitute a disproportionate share of the world's poor given their constrained access to capital and land, their lower labour market status, and their disproportionate responsibility for the provision of unpaid domestic and care work.

This, however, is not to deny the fact that some women are among the elite and have benefited enormously from the same policies that have been very adverse for the majority of the population.

Declining fertility continues to improve women's life chances in their reproductive years in most countries of the world, but in some it has also been associated with an increase in artificially high ratios of males to females (sex ratios) in the population. 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. Table 1.2 presents the most recent estimates of "missing women" —those missing as a result of the unequal treatment of males and females—in countries where the problem is considered to be acute. Figure 1.4 presents data on juvenile sex ratios and fertility rates for China and India, the two countries that account for nearly 80 per cent

Table 1.2 Estimates of "missing women"										
Country	Year	Actual number of women	Actual sex ratio	Expected sex ratio at birth	Expected sex ratio	Expected number of women	Number of missing women	% of missing women <sup>(1)</sup>		
China	2000	612.3	1.067	1.050	1.001	653.2	40.9	6.7		
Taiwan, P. of China	1999	10.8	1.049	1.052	1.002	11.3	0.5	4.7		
Korea, Rep. of	1995	22.2	1.008	1.047	1.000	22.4	0.2	0.7		
India	2001	495.7	1.072	1.039	0.993	534.8	39.1	7.9		
Pakistan	1998	62.7	1.081	1.042	1.003	67.6	4.9	7.8		
Bangladesh	2001	63.4	1.038	1.040	0.996	66.1	2.7	4.2		
Nepal	2001	11.6	0.997	1.037	0.992	11.7	0.1	0.5		
Sri Lanka	1991	8.6	1.005	1.052	1.006	8.6	0.0	0.0		
West Asia	2000	92.0	1.043	1.042	1.002	95.8	3.8	4.2		
Afghanistan	2000	11.1	1.054	1.024	0.964	12.1	1.0	9.3		
Iran, Isl. Rep. of	1996	29.5	1.033	1.039	0.996	30.6	1.1	3.7		
Egypt	1996	29.0	1.048	1.044	1.003	30.3	1.3	4.5		
Algeria	1998	14.5	1.018	1.043	1.005	14.7	0.2	1.2		
Tunisia	1994	4.3	1.021	1.043	1.000	4.4	0.1	2.1		
Sub-Saharan Africa	2000	30.7	0.987	1.017	0.970	312.5	5.5	1.8		
World		1774.8					101.3	5.7		

Note: (1) The percentage missing is arrived at by dividing the number of "missing women" by the actual number of women alive. Source: Klasen and Wink 2003.



Notes: China's sex ratios and fertility rates for 1982, 1990 and 2000. India's sex ratios for 1981, 1991 and 2001. India's fertility rates for 1980, 1990 and 2000.

Sources: Fertility rates from World Bank 2004b; sex ratios calculated from UN 2004 (for early 1980s and 1990s) and UNDESA 2001 (for early 2000s).

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.

At a more general level the ambivalent nature of women's achievements is perhaps illustrated most strikingly in the "feminization" of the labour force. In the past two decades women's access to paid work has increased in most countries, but at the same time a deterioration has occurred in the terms and conditions of much of the work on offer. The growth of informal work across the world, along with the informalization or casualization of formal sector employment, has allowed employers to lower labour costs. However for ordinary women and men the outcome has been an increasing precariousness of jobs, and greater insecurity of livelihoods. Recent

International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates suggest that informal employment tends to be a larger source of employment for women than for men in all developing regions (except North Africa).<sup>7</sup>

These various outcomes do not have one single cause. Gender inequalities are deeply entrenched in all societies and are reproduced through a variety of practices and institutions, including policy interventions. A question posed in this report is what contribution does development policy make to bringing about favourable or unfavourable conditions for achieving greater gender equality? 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, in particular in redressing inequalities between women and men?

### THE DISABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

If the record of the policy model in reducing poverty and promoting growth is the subject of ongoing debate, most analysts agree that it has been associated in most parts of the world with deepening inequality. Moreover in the 1980s and 1990s, structural adjustment left many millions unemployed and in acute poverty, creating a widespread distrust of market fundamentalism. The policies responsible for deepening inequality and for the social crisis 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.

The neoliberal economic agenda, also known as the Washington Consensus, which rose to predominance in the early 1980s, centred on the strengthening of private property rights and profit-driven markets, and called for the "rollback of the state". To give full reign to the "invisible hand" of the market, primary emphasis was to be placed on price stability and governments were urged to restrict public spending. At the same time, state-centric strategies and policies were widely discredited, often justly, for fostering clientelism and corruption, authoritarianism, and a lack of state accountability to citizens. With earlier policy models having lost much of their appeal, and in the absence of adequate debate about the reform agenda, neoliberal ideas quickly took hold while critical voices were sidelined. It took the "lost decade" of the 1980s to reveal the severe limitations, risks and human costs of market fundamentalism.

Adjustment policies without adequate safety nets placed the livelihoods of low-income households in both rural and urban contexts under severe stress. Insecurity became a wide-spread feature of daily life even for the most protected public sector workers such as teachers, nurses and civil servants, many of whom were now forced to make regular forays into the informal economy to supplement their dwindling incomes.<sup>10</sup> In the "scramble for cash" and under conditions of economic hardship, low-income women became increasingly visible both as casual agricultural labourers and in the over-crowded urban informal economy; and as migrants from countryside to town and across international borders.

Meanwhile, the creeping commercialization of welfare services meant that poorer households had to adjust by shifting more of the care into the household and onto the shoulders of women and girls; while the increased monetary cost of health services meant that women could less frequently afford to use such services for themselves and their children. Markets—not as they are hypothesized to function in neoliberal economics, but as they are "substantiated" <sup>12</sup> or made operative through the interaction of real social groups <sup>13</sup>—were powerful drivers of inequality, social exclusion and discrimination against women, whose unpaid care work held the social fabric together without recognition or reward.

# THE SOBERING ASSESSMENTS OF 2000

As researchers documented the social costs of macroeconomic policies, more sober accounts of global developments emerged, especially after the Russian and Asian financial crisis of 1997 which underscored the fragility of an international order based on unregulated financial flows. By 2000, when the "Plus Five" reviews of the global conferences of 1995 took place, there was much less certainty that neoliberal globalization was going 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. The new market orthodoxy was not delivering even on its own terms: growth rates were disappointing (see section 1). Financial crises and economic volatility were more frequent, with predictable economic and social consequences. Income inequalities 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 markets.

The social crisis that has continued to hit many parts of the world has perhaps been expressed most dramatically in the civil unrest and political turmoil, including outbreaks and continuations of civil wars, in which underlying economic and social

distress are among the causal dynamics. In such zones of insecurity and pervasive violence, few escape the disastrous impacts of warfare whether or not they are actively involved as combatants. Women's particular vulnerabilities during war and conflict were drawn to world attention by women's rights activists, especially in connection with the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the genocide in Rwanda; these two events were mainly responsible for revealing to the world the extent of crimes of sexual violence and their systematic use as weapons of war. <sup>14</sup> However, women are also profoundly affected by war and violence in their socially constructed gender roles as family carers and providers.

Even where conflict has ceased, crime rates have typically 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 in law and order, of police and judicial systems, of health and education services, and a weakening of social and ethical norms. <sup>15</sup> In "normal" times too, crime and violence have seemed 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 system. <sup>16</sup>

#### THE UNRISD REPORT

The impetus for this report was the recognition that in the maelstrom of ideas and events associated with the recent past, there has been some loss of gender perspective among the many issues vying for attention in international policy debates. While liberalization and governance reform programmes have received critical attention and generated considerable debate, there has been a lack of systematic appraisal from the point of view of gender equality. At a time when organizations and researchers concerned about the progress of women in the world, within the UN system and beyond, are preparing the "Beijing Plus Ten" assessment requested for 2005 by the UN General Assembly in June 2000, an UNRISD Report which set out to redeem this omission appeared appropriate.

The report aims to reestablish the centrality of gender equality in ongoing efforts to reorient the development agenda to meet some of the key challenges that are integral to the development process: economic growth and structural transformation; equality and social protection; and democratization. These objectives resonate with those elaborated in the United Nations Charter more than 50 years ago, and have been reinforced through key international conventions that numerous countries have signed and ratified in the subsequent period. They were also at the heart of the United Nations Conferences of the 1990s.

In the past few years several major policy reports from organizations within and outside the UN system have underlined the salience of gender issues to development processes, in different ways and from diverse points of view.<sup>17</sup> This report adds fresh perspectives and its own distinctive analysis to the debate.

Rather than attempt to review all potential areas of concern to women identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, UNRISD determined to focus on a more limited range of issues, essentially those areas of policy and institutional reform critical for the substantiation of women's rights and the search for gender equality in an unequal world. In reflecting on the recent achievements of the post-Beijing agenda, and in exploring the reasons for the ambivalent outcomes, the report addresses directly or indirectly eight of the 12 key areas of concern articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action. These are: Women and Poverty; Women and Health; Violence against Women; Women and Armed Conflict; Women and the Economy; Women in Power and Decision-Making; Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women; and Human Rights of Women. These topics are addressed within the following four key thematic areas the report has singled out for analysis.

# Macroeconomics, well-being and gender equality

This analysis of macroeconomic policies from a gender perspective begins by reviewing the many areas of contention thrown up by the neoliberal agenda, the currently dominant economic policy model. There has been a tendency by mainstream analysts to treat macroeconomic policy as a gender-free or gender-neutral zone, and to ignore the gender impacts of policy choices; yet all outcomes in terms of growth, structural transformation, equality, poverty and social protection have implications for gender equality or for lessening gender inequality. This review, contained in the next three chapters (chapters 2, 3 and 4), also examines whether heterodox macroeconomic policies have performed any better than neoliberal models in achieving growth and social equity, and if so whether they have served the goal of gender equality any more effectively.

#### Women, work and social policy

The next section (chapters 5 through 8) considers how policy reforms associated with the liberalization of the economy have transformed the world of work and people's access to social security more broadly, and the implications for low-income women in particular. The past decade has seen the emergence of women as the dominant workforce in various sectors of the economy, with many potentially positive implications. However, much depends on what kind of work is available to them, and the degree to which seeking paid work represents a distress strategy to sustain family livelihood. At the same time women have been facing additional burdens in their domestic management and care roles. The key question posed is whether some of the opportunities that have recently opened up for women compensate adequately for the burdens and risks that the same policy agenda has thrust upon society, and particularly upon women. While numerous innovative initiatives by civilsociety organizations, social movements and government bodies address the insecurity of livelihoods confronted by informal women workers, the standard reforms in social security (such as pensions) and service provision (such as health sector reforms) have tended to widen gender gaps. Gender analysis rarely informs social policy, and tends to remain a "silent term", marginalized from policy debates.

#### Women in politics and public life

The section on women in politics and public life (chapters 9 through 12) strikes a different note: in these contexts, women's increased visibility is conspicuous. The section begins by holding a magnifying glass to one of the great achievements of the last decade, women's increased prominence in formal political institutions and elected assemblies. Enthusiasm for the greater show of female hands in representative bodies, however, needs to be tempered by the recognition that entrenched male biases and hierarchies still exist, and there is a long way to go before anything resembling parity is reached in most political environments. Another focus of this section is women's activism within civil society, especially in the light of political movements which mobilize around faith, ethnic identity or nationalism, and which have their own reverberations concerning femininity and women's rights. Female visibility in this context has ambivalent characteristics. On the institutional side, the current enthusiasm for "good governance" and the associated institutional reform agenda, especially the decentralization of decision-making structures, comes under scrutiny; are women making real or superficial gains by such devices as quotas and "reservations"?

# Gender, armed conflict and the search for peace

The proliferation since the end of the Cold War of internal or civil wars, the holdover conflicts from the postcolonial era, and the major military incursions associated with the contemporary "war on terror" have important implications for women. The 1990s saw widespread recognition that rape was commonly used as a weapon of war, and that sexual assault was a feature of any setting engulfed by turmoil and armed violence; but 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 noticed as programmed for peace—as instigators of peace initiatives or conflict resolution; this chimes with the idea of the quintessentially pacifying

female presence. But they are often ignored in the formal negotiations which bring postconflict institutions into being, and therefore lose out from peace settlements. Two chapters (chapters 13 and 14) inspect the gendered battlefield during war, during the search for peace, and in the postconflict environment. The limited extent to which peace secures women's interests is another example of the convenient oblivion to which gender considerations are so often confined.

#### BRINGING GENDER BACK IN

The analytic approach advanced in the report assumes that societies, their social relations, economies and power structures contain deeply etched gender divisions, in the same way that they reflect class, ethnic and racial divisions. Inequalities based on sex are a pervasive feature of all societies; they are the product of socially constructed power relations, norms and practices.

Feminist research has revealed persistent inequalities in the intrahousehold allocation of resources, rights and power, exploding the myth of family altruism and equality represented in the idea that the private sphere is always a "haven in a heartless world". 18 Documenting the dark side of family life has not meant that the injustices committed against girls and women within the private domain—in terms of either severe resource deprivation, or physical and sexual abuse—are being adequately addressed and remedied. Indeed, the domestic arena remains one of the most difficult and controversial of policy contexts. Even where progressive laws have been put in place to protect the victims of domestic violence, weak implementation—through elitist and sometimes corrupt judicial and police systems—means that those who need protection against violence and abuse in the domestic domain often remain vulnerable and at risk. Nevertheless, within policy debates on gender, the family and the household have come under increasing scrutiny over the past decade. There are some interesting shifts in policy that reflect the findings of intrahousehold research: anti-poverty programmes, whether in the form of micro-credit or cash transfers to poor households, increasingly target women on the grounds that they will spend the resources under their control in ways that enhance family and child welfare.

While institutions such as the World Bank now concern themselves with gender inequalities in some institutional arenas—at the intrahousehold level in particular, as well as in the legal domain where traditions and customs have an important role to play—the attention to gender is selective and uneven.<sup>19</sup> The silences and omissions in such frameworks are particularly revealing: significantly, markets and macroeconomic flows (trade, capital) are not subjected to the same gender analysis, the implicit assumption being that they are essentially benign and gender-neutral. However, the report finds that this is true neither of the economy nor of the family; nor do states, communities, political parties or "progressive" social movements necessarily operate in gender-neutral ways. Indeed the reverse is more common. The evidence presented by the report reveals gender inequality to be a persistent and integral feature of the modern world, even though some of the modalities through which it is expressed have undergone change in recent times.

#### Gender and men

The analysis undertaken by the report is largely of social relations, and particularly gender relations, across a wide spectrum of institutions in both private and public life. The primary focus, however, is on women (differentiated by class, race, ethnicity and caste) even though full recognition is given in the analysis to the complex web of social/gender relations in which they are involved. It is important to keep the spotlight on women, in view of the recent shifts in thinking (and language) in development bureaucracies as well as in some strands of academic research, which have sometimes inadvertently blunted the significance of women's subordination.<sup>20</sup>

Feminist researchers have raised concerns at the shift that has occurred away from a focus on women, towards women and men, and then back to men. Activists from the Caribbean have described how this has resulted in an emphasis on "men at risk". Women in this region score higher than men on a variety of indicators, including education and health. Yet women also

face unemployment rates which are twice those of men. When coupled with the prevalence of female-headed households (over 35 per cent in a number of Caribbean countries), women's job exclusion undermines the case for considering women to be "better off than men". Moreover, despite justified concern about low male educational attainment, society clearly has different expectations of males and females. Male educational underachievement has not led to parallel underachievements in wealth and politics. Women need higher levels of attainment than men to compete for jobs, decision-making positions, and access to an equal share of productive resources. <sup>22</sup>

However, if gender hierarchies are not disappearing and if the subordination of women continues to be a significant social issue, this does not invariably mean that men are advantaged. Masculinist cultures can be counter-productive or even destructive for men, reinforcing the point that men too have gender identities which expose them to risks. This is shown by the excess mortality of adult males under conditions in which economic stress undermines the norm of the "male breadwinner", a role closely interwoven with men's sense of identity across many cultures. One example is provided by the high rates of suicide among male cotton farmers in Andhra Pradesh, India, in 2001 as a result of indebtedness.<sup>23</sup> Another is the excess mortality of adult males in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 due to stress-related health risks and alcoholism associated with unemployment and other adverse labour market changes.<sup>24</sup> While men are the main perpetrators of violence, both domestic and public, they are also the main victims of violence outside the domestic sphere.

The emphasis on women's subordination does not imply a static picture of unchanging gender relations: rather, it is important to acknowledge that gender hierarchies constantly change. Current processes of social change and their intersections with policies show that while some forms of gender inequality have dissolved and women have been able to enjoy new opportunities and freedoms, other forms of subordination and new constraints have emerged. As women have gained access to education and paid work, won the right to vote and stand for political office, and have achieved some control over their sexuality and fertility, they have also had to contend with segmented labour markets,

exposure to workplace discrimination, greater personal insecurity, and increasingly commercialized sexuality. In the same vein, anthropological research on youth cultures demonstrates the ways in which gender roles are constantly recreated by simultaneously breaking with past models and reproducing some traditional attributes of these roles, such as male aggressiveness.

### CURRENT POLICY AGENDAS: IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

#### The rediscovery of "the social"

The political and policy context of recent years has presented some new opportunities and challenges for those concerned with gender equality and women's rights. In response to escalating popular discontent, as well as internal and external criticism from leading economists, international financial institutions (IFIs) have shown themselves willing to give social and political concerns renewed attention. The rediscovery of these areas of policy concern is expressed under indicative conceptual headings such as "participation", "social capital" and "good governance". The change of direction was particularly evident in the World Bank's 2001 World Development Report: Attacking Poverty, which identified "social risk management" as the most sustainable basis for poverty reduction.<sup>25</sup> The "good governance" agenda ostensibly seeks to make development more participatory and more responsive to the needs of marginalized groups, including women.

However, while this may have led to a degree of mutual accommodation between the IFIs and their critics and rendered the Washington Consensus more palatable, many of its central policy tenets remain in place. The dominant policy package—known as the "post-Washington Consensus"—retains the core elements of economic orthodoxy: trade and financial liberalization, and tight monetary and fiscal policies, while adding the "good governance" agenda of democracy, participation, decentralization and community ownership. It

would be more accurate to speak of a new "moment" in the neoliberal agenda than of a new paradigm.<sup>26</sup>

There are therefore important continuities, as well as some innovations in the current policy agenda, and it is in this light that some of the recent policy responses to social distress, such as the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), need to be seen. Behind the apparent consensus forged by a shared vocabulary of "poverty" and "social protection", conflicting understandings of social policy continue to vie for attention. These are based on different values, priorities, and understandings of state responsibility and of the responsibilities of different individuals and social groups to each other. In the social risk management framework, 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.

An alternative view of social policy is premised on the centrality of redistribution, equality and universal social provision. This is not merely an abstract proposition but is grounded in the historical experiences of building the welfare state in many European countries. Recent adaptations and reforms may have diluted those principles but they have not fundamentally overturned them. The goals of inclusion and universal social provision are also 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 intact. Despite glaring social inequalities in countries like Brazil, South Africa and Chile, efforts are being made to extend social protection mechanisms to people in rural areas and in informal work situations.

### "Good governance" reforms and the democratic deficit

An emphasis on "good governance" has been an integral part of the Washington 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 has been essential to the success of many pro-democracy movements, especially when conventional channels for popular expression (political parties, trade unions) have been closed to political activists. However, mobilization in opposition to authoritarian rule has not always secured women representation in formal institutional politics after the transition, especially where transitions have been sudden, or 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". 27 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. 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.

#### Contrasting and contested interpretations

A broad understanding of a "good governance" agenda would embrace political liberalization, participation and human rights, and 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. 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.

Some of the reforms may indeed have very 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.<sup>28</sup>

### Decentralization as a forward and backward step

Good governance reforms have also 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 non-governmental organizations (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 will themselves contribute to the consolidation of democracy or its reverse.

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.

#### The resurgence of identity politics

A phenomenon to emerge 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. 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. 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 by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. This is not the only case of its kind: the Islamist movement in Iran that captured state power 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.31 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 of these 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.32 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.

The "traditions" and religious doctrines typically invoked by some of these movements may be neither traditional nor authentic, but 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. 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.<sup>33</sup>

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 a sin as well as against the law. 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".

# FORGING LINKS BETWEEN ECONOMIC POLICY AND GENDER EQUALITY

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"? 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 macroeconomic policies and development strategies on which their livelihoods and ways of life, and those of their families and communities, ultimately depend. As emerges from the evidence presented in the following chapters of this report, 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 going to be a world that secures gender equality.

For this reason, women's rights activists have increasingly been devoting more of their attention and energies 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.<sup>36</sup>

These links between global economic justice and women's rights have been central to women's global campaigns for sexual and reproductive health and rights. 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 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 as set out in box 1.1.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Box 1.1** Sexual and reproductive health are human rights

Rights cannot be divorced from needs. Reproductive and sexual health and other basic human needs—education, sanitation, clean water, nutrition—are equally important and interdependent; all are human rights. Especially for women, good pre-natal and obstetric care, safe contraception, and other aspects of health are inseparable from such basic amenities as reliable transportation, hygienic conditions and clean water. At the same time, their rights to liberty, security of the person and development are unattainable without comprehensive, accessible and affordable reproductive and sexual health services and the freedom to make decisions about their fertility and sexuality. These rights form a seamless web, and all are grounded in basic human needs. To rank them denies the basic realities of women's lives, especially for poor women.

Source: Excerpt from flier, circulated at the UNGASS for ICPD+5, March 1999, by Women's Coalition for ICPD, made up of 80 NGOs from around the world, cited in Petchesky 2003:15.

Yet creating 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 actually to realize gendersensitive policy change, is no easy task. In attempting to make an impact on global rule-making, feminist activists need not only to bring on board those governments and global institutions that are redesigning the architecture of the international political economy, but also to enlist the support of mainstream activists who are not always attentive to gender equality concerns.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the global political environment in which economic justice and gender justice have to be negotiated has been less favourable in recent years. In the mid-1990s the Vatican and some Islamic country delegations united against the adoption of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, and maintained persistent opposition to gender-equality proposals through succeeding 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.<sup>39</sup> Despite such tensions over women's rights, considerable advances were nevertheless possible on sexual and reproductive health and rights during the 1990s because of the limited control over state power by religious fundamentalists. 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.

#### Confronting complex realities

Such positive outcomes were however hard won, and 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 look fragile. Human rights and 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 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.

There is, however, 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, even at times 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.

Governments have not, in the main, caved in to such pressures, as emerged in regional and subregional 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; but within the new alliance there is no common ground on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and indeed positions vary considerably. 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.

### WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS: WALKING A TIGHTROPE TO CHANGE

If gender justice is not to slip down the agenda yet again, women's movements will require new alliances with both governmental institutions and social movements. Working with governments means enlarging the scope for representing women's interests in all areas of policy making, including economic policy. While gender analysis reveals the ways in which economic policies are gendered, and women's movements can demand that policies that disadvantage women be changed, the arenas in which these policies are debated have rarely included significant representation of women's interests. Getting recognition of the need for a gender perspective in fora where macroeconomic discussion takes place is difficult, but a first step has been taken with the successful lobbying for gender budgets.

Alliances with new and old social movements are also essential, but require 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. For their part, women's movements that have not considered broader social or economic justice issues may be

limited in their efficacy. If progress towards the goal of gender equality has been uneven, this is partly because some of the obstacles to achieving it lie in the character and tactics of the forces that seek it, even while others lie in the structures and practices through which gender inequalities are reproduced. The key question on the table for discussion is 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?

UNRISD hopes that this report will help provide some answers to this question by casting light on some of the processes—economic, political and social—that link gender and economic justice. In this way it should contribute to the debate over how gender equality might best be advanced. In recent decades, the world has become more unequal as neoliberal macroeconomic policies have tightened their hold, and previously accepted values such as equality and redistribution have systematically 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 in meeting 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, is the task set out for subsequent chapters in this report.

### Notes

- 1 Therborn 2004.
- 2 UNESCO 2003; Jha and Subrahmanian 2004.
- 3 Milanovic 2003; Cornia et al. 2004.
- 4 The case of China is controversial because its high rates of economic growth and decline in poverty have been the outcome of heterodox macroeconomic policies (for example, China maintains a non-convertible currency and state control over its banking system) rather than the standard prescriptions of the international financial institutions. It is problematic therefore to use global evidence on poverty that is biased by poverty reduction in China to defend the orthodox macroeconomic policy agenda.
- 5 Because the female human being is more biologically robust, there should be a higher number of women than 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 (Klasen and Wink 2003; Das Gupta and Bhat 1998; Jackson and Rao 2004).
- 6 Sen 1989, 1990.
- 7 ILO 2002b.
- 8 Milanovic 2003; Wade 2001; Cornia et al. 2004.
- 9 Elson 2002.
- 10 Bangura 1994.
- 11 Bryceson 1999b.
- 12 Polanyi 1957.
- 13 Hewitt de Alcántara 1993.
- 14 UN Secretary-General 2002.
- 15 UN Secretary-General 2002; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Commission on Human Security 2003.
- 16 Caldeira 2000.
- 17 UNDESA produced The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development in 1985, 1989, 1994 and 1999; the UN General Assembly has requested that this continue to be updated on a quinquennial basis. The Human Development Report Office of the UNDP devoted its 1995 Human Development Report to gender issues. UNIFEM produced Progress of the World's Women in 2000 and in 2002 (volumes I and II), and the World Bank brought out a Policy Research Report entitled Engendering Development in 2001.

- 18 Whitehead 1981; Folbre 1986; Dwyer and Bruce 1988; Sen 1990; Agarwal 1990; Kabeer 1994; Hart 1995.
- 19 World Bank 2001a.
- 20 Baden and Goetz 1998; Razavi and Miller 1995.
- 21 Seguino 2003b.
- 22 Bailey 2003.
- 23 Patnaik 2003.
- 24 Cornia 1996.
- 25 World Bank 2001c; Holzmann and Jorgensen 2000.
- 26 Molyneux 2002.
- 27 O'Donnell 1993, 1998; Eisenstein 1993.
- 28 Whitehead and Tsikata 2003.
- 29 Phillips 2002; Molyneux and Razavi 2002b.
- 30 Hernandez Castillo 2002.
- 31 Paidar 2002.
- 32 Basu 2004.
- 33 Molyneux and Razavi 2002b.
- 34 WLUML 2004.
- 35 Ertürk 2004, quoted in Collins 2004.
- 36 Mohanty 2003.
- 37 Petchesky 2003.
- 38 Liebowitz 2004.
- 39 Sen and Correa 1999.
- 40 Sen 2004.
- 41 Sen 2004; Liebowitz 2004.