

of the United Nations Decade for Women. The Strategies demand that governments:

- Play key roles in ensuring that both men and women enjoy equal rights in such areas as education, training and employment.
- Act to remove negative stereotypes and perceptions of women.
- Disseminate information to women about their rights and entitlements.
- Collect timely and accurate statistics on women and monitor their situation.
- Encourage the sharing and support of domestic responsibilities.

Even with progress in legislation, women – especially poor women – are still a long way from receiving social recognition for what they do. *De facto* discrimination on the grounds of sex is insidious but widespread. For example, the Bangladesh Constitution guarantees the equal rights of men and women and sanctions affirmative action programmes in favour of women but as the data reveals the status of women in Bangladesh is among the lowest in the world. It is encouraging, then, that policy makers there have stepped up efforts to implement programmes for women, particularly in health and education.

Many societies deny women independence from family and male control, particularly where girls are married at a very young age to much older men. According to estimates from the World Fertility Survey, almost half the women in Africa, 40% in Asia and 30% in Latin America are married by the age of 18. Men are on average four to eight years older. And a woman's social status is often linked entirely to her reproductive role. Failure to bear children – or even to bear sons – is cause of ostracism, divorce and even brutality in areas of Africa and southern Asia.

The Nairobi Strategies restate demands in the 1957 and 1962 international conventions for equal status of women and men in marriage and in the dissolution of marriage. In addition to such reforms in marriage laws and practices, efforts to improve women's economic status and autonomy – to reflect their economic responsibilities and contributions – can bring them closer to an equal footing with men in and out of the household.<sup>4</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN IN 1995<sup>5</sup>

Issues of gender equality are moving to the top of the global agenda but better understanding of women's and men's contributions to society is essential to speed the shift from agenda to policy to practice. Too often, women and men live in different worlds, worlds that differ in access to education and work opportunities, and in health, personal security and leisure time. *The World's Women, 1995*, provides information and analyses to highlight the economic, political and social differences that still separate women's and men's lives and how these differences are changing.

How different are these worlds? Anecdote and misperception abound, in large part because good information has been lacking. As a result, policy has been ill-informed, strategy unfounded and practice unquestioned. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. It is changing because advocates of women's interests have

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4 *The World's Women, 1970–90* (HMSO, 1991), pp 1–6.

5 *United Nations Report* (HMSO, 1995).

done much in the past 20 years to sharpen people's awareness of the importance of gender concerns. It is changing because this growing awareness has, by raising new questions and rephrasing old, greatly increased the demand for better statistics to inform and focus the debate. And it is changing because women's contributions – and women's rights – have moved to the centre of social and economic change.

The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, was a breakthrough. It established a new consensus on two fundamental points:

- Empowering women and improving their status are essential to realising the full potential of economic, political and social development.
- Empowering women is an important end in itself. And as women acquire the same status, opportunities and social, economic and legal rights as men, as they acquire the right to reproductive health and the right to protection against gender based violence, human well-being will be enhanced.

The International Conference on Population and Development drew together the many strands of thought and action initiated by two decades of women's conferences. It was also the culmination of an active effort by women's groups to lobby international forums for women's issues. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, nongovernmental organisations pushed for understanding the link between women's issues and sustainable development. At the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, women's rights were finally accepted as issues of international human rights.

At the Population Conference and later at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, the terms of discourse shifted. Not only were women on the agenda – women helped set the agenda. The empowerment of women was not merely the subject of special sessions about women's issues. It was accepted as a crucial element in any strategy seeking to solve social, economic and environmental problems. And building on the advances made in the recognition of women's human rights at the World Conference in Vienna, women's human rights became a focus of the debate in Cairo. The rights approach, advanced by women's groups, was added to the core objectives of development policy and the movement for women's equality.

To promote action on the new consensus, this second edition of *The World's Women* builds on the first, presenting statistical summaries of health, schooling, family life, work and public life. Each has to be seen in proper context, however. Yes, there have been important changes in the past 25 years and women have generally made steady progress, but it is impossible to make sweeping global statements. Women's labour force participation rates are up in much of the world, but down in countries wracked by war and economic decline. Girls' education is improving, but there are hundreds of millions of illiterate women and girls who do not complete primary schooling, especially in Africa and southern Asia.

It is also important to look at a range of indicators. Women's political participation may be high in the Nordic countries, but in employment Nordic women still face considerable job segregation and wage discrimination. Women's higher education may be widespread in western Asia, but in many of those countries there are few or no women in important political positions and work opportunities are largely limited to unpaid family labour.

*The World's Women* presents few global figures, focusing instead on country data

and regional averages. There are myriad differences among countries in every field and *The World's Women* tries to find a meaningful balance between detailed country statements and broad generalisation. Generalisations are primarily drawn at the regional and subregional levels where there is a high degree of uniformity among countries. For all the topics covered, *The World's Women* has tapped as many statistical sources as possible, with detailed references as a basis for further study. Specialised studies are used when they encompass several countries, preferably in more than one region, so as to avoid presenting conclusions relevant in only one country.

Indicators relevant to specific age groups are crucial to understanding women's situation. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development identified equality for the girl-child as a necessary first step in ensuring that women realise their full potential and become equal partners with men. This edition of *The World's Women* responds to this concern by highlighting the experience of the girl-child. Evidence of prenatal sex selection and differences in mortality, health, school enrolment and even work indicates that girls and boys are not treated equally.

The experience of the elderly is more difficult to describe from the few available data. Although elderly people constitute a valuable component of societies' human resources, data on the elderly are insufficient for regional generalisations. Considering that the numbers of elderly are growing rapidly in all regions, this gap needs to be addressed.

### *Education for empowerment*

In the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, education is considered one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in development processes. Educated women marry later, want fewer children, are more likely to use effective methods of contraception and have greater means to improve their economic livelihood.

Through widespread promotion of universal primary education, literacy rates for women have increased over the past few decades – to at least 75% in most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and eastern and southeastern Asia. But high rates of illiteracy among women still prevail in much of Africa and in parts of Asia. And when illiteracy is high it almost always is accompanied by large differences in rates between women and men.

At intermediate levels of education, girls have made progress in their enrolment in school through the second level. The primary-secondary enrolment ratio is now about equal for girls and boys in the developed regions and Latin America and the Caribbean and is approaching near equality in eastern, southeastern and western Asia. But progress in many countries was reversed in the 1980s, particularly among those experiencing problems of war, economic adjustment and declining international assistance – as in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and eastern Europe.

In higher education enrolments, women equal or exceed men in many regions. They outnumber men in the developed regions outside western Europe, in Latin America and the Caribbean and western Asia. Women are not as well represented in other regions, and in sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia they are far behind – 30 and 38 women per 100 men.

The Framework for Action to implement the World Declaration on Education for All states that it is urgent to improve access to education for girls and women and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. Priority

actions include eliminating the social and cultural barriers that discourage – or even exclude – girls and women from the benefits of regular education programmes.

*Seeking influence*

Despite progress in women's higher education, major obstacles still arise when women strive to translate their high-level education into social and economic advancement. In the world of business, for example, women rarely account for more than 1% or 2% of top executive positions. In the more general category of administration and management including middle levels, women's share rose in every region but one between 1980 and 1990. Women's participation jumped from 16% to 33% in developed regions outside Europe. In Latin America, it rose from 18% to 25%.

In the health and teaching professions – two of the largest occupational fields requiring advanced training – women are well represented in many countries but usually at the bottom levels of the status and wage hierarchy. Similarly, among the staff of an international group of agriculture research institutes, women's participation at the nonscientific and trainee levels is moderate, but there are few women at management and senior scientific levels.

The information people receive through newspapers, radio and television shapes their opinions about the world. And the more decision-making positions women hold in the media, the more they can influence output; breaking stereotypes that hurt women, attracting greater attention to issues of equality in the home and in public life, and providing young women with new images, ideas and ideals. Women now make up more than half of the communications students in a large number of countries and are increasingly visible as presenters, announcers and reporters, but they remain poorly represented in the more influential media occupations such as programme managers and senior editors.

In the top levels of government, women's participation remains the exception. At the end of 1994 only ten women were heads of state or government; of these ten countries only Norway had as many as one third women ministers or subministers. Some progress has been made in the appointment of women to ministerial or subministerial positions but these positions are usually tenuous for them. Most countries with women in top ministerial positions do not have comparable representation at the subministerial level. And in other countries, where significant numbers of women have reached the subministerial levels, very few have reached the top. Progress for women in parliaments has also been mixed and varies widely among regions. It is strongest in northern Europe, where it appears to be rising steadily.

Missing from this summary is women's remarkable advance in less traditional paths to power and influence. The importance of the United Nations Decade for Women and international women's conferences should not be underestimated, for these forums enabled women to develop the skills required for exercising power and influence, to mobilise resources and articulate issues and to practise organising, lobbying and legislating. Excluded from most political offices, many women have found a voice in nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) at the grass roots, national and international levels. NGOs have taken issues previously ignored – such as violence against women and rights to reproductive health – and brought them into the mainstream policy debate.

Since the women's conference in Nairobi in 1985, many grass roots groups have been working to create new awareness of women's rights, including their rights within the family, and to help women achieve those rights. They have set

agendas and carved out a space for women's issues. And as seen in recent United Nations conferences, NGOs as a group can wield influence broad enough to be active partners with governments in deciding national policies and programmes.

### *Reproductive health – reproductive freedom*

With greater access to education, employment and contraception, many women are choosing to marry later and have fewer children. Those who wait to marry and begin childbearing have better access to education and greater opportunities to improve their lives. Women's increased access to education, to employment and to contraception, coupled with declining rates of infant mortality, have contributed to the worldwide decline in fertility.

The number of children women bear in developed regions is now below replacement levels at 1.9 per woman. In Latin America and in most parts of Asia it has also dropped significantly. But in Africa women still have an average of six children and in many sub-Saharan African countries women have as many or more children now than they did 20 years ago.

Adolescent fertility has declined in many developing and developed countries over the past 20 years. In Central America and sub-Saharan Africa, however, rates are five to seven times higher than in developed regions. Inadequate nutrition, anaemia and early pregnancies threaten the health and life of young girls and adolescents.

Too many women lack access to reproductive health services. In developing countries maternal mortality is a leading cause of death for women of reproductive age. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that more than half a million women die each year in childbirth and millions more develop pregnancy-related health complications. The deteriorating economic and health conditions in sub-Saharan Africa led to an increase in maternal mortality during the 1980s, where it remains the highest in the world. An African woman's lifetime risk of dying from pregnancy related causes is one in 23, while a North American woman's is one in 4,000. Maternal mortality also increased in some countries of eastern Europe.

Pregnancy and childbirth have become safer for women in most of Asia and in parts of Latin America. In developed countries attended delivery is almost universal, but in developing countries only 55% of births take place with a trained attendant and only 37% in hospitals or clinics. Today new importance is being placed on women's reproductive health and safe motherhood as advocates work to redefine reproductive health as an issue of human rights.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development set forth a new framework to guide government actions in population, development and reproductive health and to measure and evaluate programmes designed to realise these objectives. Instead of the traditional approach centred on family planning and population policy objectives, governments are encouraged to develop client-centred management information systems in population and development and particularly reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health programmes.

### *Fewer marriages – smaller households*

Rapid population changes, combined with many other social and economic changes, are being accompanied by considerable changes in women's household and family status. Most people still marry but they marry later in life, especially women. In developing regions, consensual unions and other nonformal unions remain prevalent, especially in rural areas. As a result of these changes, many women – many more women than men – spend a significant part of their life

without a partner, with important consequences for their economic welfare and their children's.

In developed regions, marriage has become both less frequent and less stable, and cohabitation is on the rise. Marriages preceded by a period of cohabitation have clearly increased in many countries of northern Europe. And where divorce once led quickly to remarriage, many postpone marriage or never remarry.

Since men have higher rates of remarriage, marry at an older age, and have a shorter life expectancy, most older men are married, while many older women are widows. Among women 60 and older, widowhood is significant everywhere – from 40% in the developed regions and Latin America to 50% in Africa and Asia. Moreover, in Asia and Africa, widowhood also affects many women at younger ages.

Between 1970 and 1990 household size decreased significantly in the developed regions, in Latin America and the Caribbean and in eastern and southeastern Asia. Households are the smallest in developed regions, having declined to an average of 2.8 persons per household in 1990. In eastern Asia the average household size has declined to 3.7, in southeastern Asia to 4.9. In Latin American countries the average fell to 4.7 persons per household, and in the Caribbean to 4.1. In northern African countries household size increased on average from 5.4 to 5.7.

In developed countries the decline in the average household size reflects an increase in the number of one-person households, especially among unmarried adults and the elderly. In developing regions the size of the household is more affected by the number of children although a shift from extended households to nuclear households also has some effect. Household size remains high in countries where fertility has not yet fallen significantly – for instance, in some of the African and western Asian countries.

#### *Work – paid and unpaid*

Women's access to paid work is crucial to their self-reliance and the economic well-being of dependent family members. But access to such work is unequal between women and men. Women work in different occupations than men, almost always with lower status and pay.

In developing countries many women work as unpaid family labourers in subsistence agriculture and household enterprises. Many women also work in the informal sector, where their remuneration is unstable, and their access to funds to improve their productivity is limited at best. And whatever other work women do, they also have the major responsibility for most household work, including the care of children and other family members.

The work women do contributes substantially to the well-being of families, communities and nations. But work in the household – even when it is economic – is inadequately measured, and this subverts policies for the credit, income and security of women and their families.

Over the past two decades, women's reported economic activity rates increased in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa and eastern Asia, and all of these increases are large except in eastern Europe, central Asia and Oceania. In fact, women's labour force participation increased more in the 1980s than in the 1970s in many regions. In contrast, men's economic activity rates have declined everywhere except central Asia.

The decline in women's reported labour force participation in sub-Saharan Africa

stands out as an exception – dropping from a high of 57% in 1970 to 54% in 1980 to 53% in 1990.

In 1990 the average labour force participation rate among women aged 15 and over ranged from a high of 56 to 58% in eastern and central Asia and eastern Europe to a low in northern Africa of 21%. The participation rates of men vary within a more limited range of 72 to 83%. Because so many women in developing countries work in agriculture and informal household enterprises, where their contributions are underreported, their recorded rates of economic activity should be higher in many cases. The estimated increase in southern Asia – from 25% of women economically active in 1970 to 44% in 1990 – may be due largely to changes in the statistical methods used rather than to significant changes in work patterns.

Although work in subsistence production is crucial to survival, it goes largely under-reported in population and agricultural surveys and censuses. Most of the food eaten in agricultural households in developing countries is produced within the family holding, much of it by women. Some data show the extent of women's unreported work in agriculture. In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, government surveys using methods to improve the measurement of subsistence work, report that more than half of rural women engage in such activities as tending poultry or cattle, planting rice, drying seeds, collecting water and preparing dung cakes for fuel. Direct observation of women's activities suggests that almost all women in rural areas contribute economically in one way or another.

The informal sector – working on own-account and in small family enterprises – also provides women with important opportunities in areas where salaried employment is closed or inadequate. In five of the six African countries studied by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, more than one third of women economically active outside agriculture work in the informal sector, and in seven countries of Latin America 15 to 20%. In nine countries in Asia the numbers vary – from less than 10% of economically active women in western Asia to 41% in the Republic of Korea and 65% in Indonesia.

Although fewer women than men participate in the labour force, in some countries – including Honduras, Jamaica and Zambia – more women than men make up the informal sector labour force. In several other countries, women make up 40% or more of the informal sector.

In addition to the invisibility of many of women's economic activities, women remain responsible for most housework, which also goes unmeasured by the System of National Accounts. But time-use data for many developed countries show almost everywhere that women work at least as many hours each week as men, and in a large number of countries they work at least two hours more than men. Further, the daily time a man spends on work tends to be the same throughout working life. But a woman's working time fluctuates widely and at times is extremely heavy – the result of combining paid work, household and childcare responsibilities.

Two-thirds to three-quarters of household work in developed regions is performed by women. In most countries studied, women spend 30 hours or more on housework each week while men spend around ten hours. Among household tasks, the division of labour remains clear and definite in most countries. Few men do the laundry, clean the house, make the beds, iron the clothes. And most women do little household repair and maintenance. Even when employed outside the home, women do most of the housework.

*Efforts to generate better statistics*

The first world conference on women in Mexico in 1975 recognised the importance of improving statistics on women. Until the early 1980s women's advocates and women's offices were the main forces behind this work. Big efforts had not yet been launched in statistical offices – either nationally or internationally.

The collaboration of the Statistical Division of the United Nations' Secretariat with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) – beginning in 1982 – on a training programme to promote dialogue and understanding between policy makers and statisticians, laid the groundwork for a comprehensive programme of work.

By the time of the world conference in Nairobi in 1985 some progress was evident. The Statistical Division compiled 39 key statistical indicators on the situation of women for 172 countries, and important efforts at the national level included the preparation of *Women and Men in Sweden*, first published in 1984 and with sales of 100,000.

Since Nairobi numerous developments have strengthened and given new momentum to this work. The general approach in development strategy has moved from women in development to gender and development. The focus has shifted from women in isolation to women in relation to men – to the roles each has, the relationships between them and the different impacts of policies and programmes.

In statistics the focus has likewise moved from attention to women's statistics to gender statistics. There now is a recognition, for example, that biases in statistics apply not only to women but also to men – in their roles as husbands and fathers and in their roles in the household. That recognition reaches beyond the disaggregation of data by sex to assessing statistical systems in terms of gender. It asks:

- Do the topics investigated on statistics and the concepts and definitions used in data collection reflect the diversities of women's and men's lives?
- Will the methods used in collecting data take into account stereotypes and cultural factors that might produce bias?
- Are the ways data are compiled and presented well suited to the needs of policy makers, planners and others who need such data?

The first *World's Women: Trends and Statistics*, issued in 1991, presented the most comprehensive and authoritative compilation of global indicators on the status of women ever available. The book's data have informed debates at international conferences and national policy meetings and provided a resource to the press and others. Its publication greatly contributed to the understanding of data users and created, for the first time, a substantial global audience for statistical gender-based information. This audience has demanded, in turn, more and better data. The book also stimulated more work on the compilation of statistics and led to *The World's Women, 1995*, being prepared as an official conference document for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

As gender issues receive greater priority in the work programmes of international organisations. support to the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat and to national efforts to improve this work have gathered strength at UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, UNIFEM and INSTRAW, among others. ILO, FAO, WHO, UNESCO and UNHCR are also rethinking statistical recommendations and guidelines in their work to better understand women's activities and situations, and products of this change are evident in *The World's Women, 1995*.



*The World's Women, 1995*, shows considerable development in the statistics available on women and men and in ways of presenting them effectively. But it also points to important needs for new work to be addressed in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Some problems identified by the first world conference – such as the measurement of women's economic contribution and the definition of the concepts of household and household head – are still unresolved. But significant improvements have been made in many areas. Data users know much more today than 20 years ago about how women's and men's situations differ in social, political and economic life. And consumers of data are also asking many more questions that are increasing the demand for more refined statistics. Still other areas not commonly addressed in the regular production of official statistics have only begun to be explored: the male role in the family, women in poverty and women's human rights, including violence against women.

Important in today's more in-depth approach are:

- Identification of the data needed to understand the disparities in the situation, contributions and problems of women and men.
- Evaluation of existing concepts and methods against today's changed realities.
- Development of new concepts and methods to yield unbiased data.
- The preparation of statistics in formats easily accessible to a wide array of users.

None of this is easy or without cost. Every step requires considerable effort and expertise. All require integrated approaches that pull together today's often fragmented, specialised efforts and take a fresh look at methods and priorities in, say, education, employment, criminal justice, business, credit and training. All require a broader, more integrated treatment of social and economic data. And all require special efforts to improve international comparability. But required above all – for true national, regional and global assessments of the social, political and economic lives of women and men – is agreement on what the key issues are and support for how to address them.

The objective is always to produce timely statistics on women and men that can inform policy, refine strategy and influence practice. After two decades of efforts, improved gender statistics are doing much to inform policy debate and implementation. But to provide truly effective monitoring at all levels requires continuity and reinforcing the dialogue between statisticians and the consumers of statistics – policy makers, researchers, advocates and the media.<sup>6</sup>

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6 *The World's Women, 1995*, pp xvii–xxiv (United Nations Report, HMSO).



## CHAPTER 2

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### WOMEN AND CULTURE

In this chapter, the historical and traditional position of women in society is considered, not from a specifically legal standpoint, but rather from a broad political, sociological and philosophical perspective. Whatever importance is given to law as a phenomenon, the dependence of law upon the social base must be appreciated. Law does not exist in a vacuum – it is intimately connected with society. While it may be difficult at times to trace the evolution of society from one dictated purely by nature to a society with distinctive cultural mores and distinctive laws resting on those mores, the influence of both nature and culture on law is undeniable.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true in relation to the position and role of women in society. The biological fact of being female, and all the associated implications and consequences of this, translated itself early into cultural mores which distinguished between men and women. Men – having superior physical strength – took control of the public sphere of life: the control of law and government. Having asserted dominance in the public sphere, women became relegated to the private domain of home and family. By examining some of the empirical data concerning the treatment of women at differing times, it becomes possible to see the common strands of thought in relation to women, albeit being expressed in differing ways, in differing societies.

In the first extract, *Toward a Theory of Law and Patriarchy*<sup>2</sup> Janet Rifkin explains the role of law in masking social and political questions such as women's subordination in patriarchal culture. Cultural taboos – such as the universal prohibition against incest – gave rise to legal rules which then in turn reinforced the cultural force of the prohibition. Allied to this is the role ascribed to women as the property of their men: property to be exchanged between men under cultural norms which harden into legal rules. Law becomes the symbol of masculine authority and patriarchal society.

Mary Daly develops this theme in her book *Gyn/Ecology*.<sup>3</sup> Analysing the practices of Chinese footbinding, Hindu suttee and African female circumcision from a feminist perspective, Mary Daly reveals the true meaning of the practices: the control of women under the authority of men.

The extract from Marianne Hester's *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*<sup>4</sup> considers the 16th and 17th century practice in England and continental Europe of persecution and trial of women accused of witchcraft. Statute law was used to legitimise the practice and to bolster the belief in the power and evil of witchcraft. In Marianne Hester's analysis the single unifying thread which runs through the story of witch persecution is that the victims were invariably women who were not under the control of a man: spinsters or widows.

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1 See below for analysis of the development from cultural mores to law.

2 (1980) 3 *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 83.

3 The Women's Press, 1991.

4 Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992.