Structural adjustment, trade liberalisation and women’s enjoyment of their economic and social rights

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December 10, 1998 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which affirmed the essential dignity and integrity of human beings and their entitlement to the means necessary to promote and protect human dignity. The UDHR recognized that human dignity and integrity could be impaired by political, social and economic factors such as restrictions on self expression, torture, racism, sexism, hunger, homelessness and deprivation of other basic necessities of life. It thus recognized the crucial and inextricably intertwine between civil and political rights and economic and social rights. Cold war tensions and malingering on the part of the Western States resulted in the division of these two sets of rights into what was supposed to be two separate but equal covenants on human rights: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

However, in spite of the rhetoric of interdependence and indivisibility between civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, today, ICPR has become the embodiment of human rights while ICESCR has been treated as the unattractive step-sister. Therefore, unlike ICPR, ICESCR does not have a cohesive, comprehensive or recognisable framework but rather exists as bits and pieces of programmatic objectives which states may treat as negotiable and which therefore can be withdrawn and otherwise compromised. Other bits and pieces of it have been informally shunted unto the portfolios of the many specialised agencies.

For example, the ILO tackles issues such as minimum wage, social security, etc. while UNDP and the World Bank focus on poverty eradication and human development, with WHO specialising in health. Since these agencies have no clear mandate with regard to economic and social rights, some of them, most notably the World Bank, have shifted from basic needs and poverty eradication (1960s’s) to structural adjustment (1980s) which effectively contravened the results of prior efforts. Today poverty eradication is back on the agenda of the World Bank. However, the current focus on poverty might simply work to offset the injurious
effects of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), and, without careful monitoring, may not lead to real advances in social development or the achievement of its stated objective – the elimination of poverty.

In the current political and social climate of extreme market liberalism, trade liberalism and corporatism, there is even greater danger of further marginalisation of economic and social rights. This is because renewed emphasis on the free market, free trade and a pecuniary notion of competition/competitiveness is creating polarisation between efficiency and equity (Scaperlanda, 1990).

This polarisation between efficiency and equity accepts the initial distribution of resources within and between countries and believes that the market (and free trade) generates an optimal distribution of resources and capabilities (Neuberger, 1993). This neo-liberal economic, political and social paradigm is biased towards a particular kind of individual freedom, fervently holds to a pecuniary version of economic freedom (Scaperlanda, 1990), and preaches the unquestioned benefits of specialisation. In practice, corporate rights are valued over human life, and there is very little respect for human dignity. There is also an unwillingness to acknowledge that there might be untoward consequence associated with its single-minded focus on market forces.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), in their role as promoters of international economic order and co-ordinators for coherence in international policy-making, constitute the powerful triad that is facilitating the re-orienting and re-structuring of the world economy along this neo-liberal line. It is therefore important that careful attention be paid to the activities of these institutions and their implications for the economic and social rights of men and women.

Thus the international human rights system must start examining the issue of agency, and call to account those actors who create, perpetuate and are complicit in the violations of economic and social rights. Poverty and deprivation are not caused by irrational choice or by lack of individual effort. Rather the agents are clearly identifiable. They are: governments and their choices of investment, social, trade and macroeconomic policies; international financial and trade institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO and regional development banks); transnational corporations and other actors in the international and domestic credit and money markets. These are the same actors who to different degrees are associated with the lack, or the violations, of civil and political rights.
The rest of this paper is a tentative examination of the economic and social rights implications of both the Structural Adjustment Programs of the IMF and the World Bank and the trade liberalisation agenda of the WTO; particular attention is paid to their impact on women’s economic and social rights. Section one presents a brief overview of structural adjustment programs, drawing out implications for economic and social rights, while section two examines in great details the trade liberalisation process and its implications for women’s social and economic advancement. The concluding section draws some parallels between the reinforce effects of structural adjustment and trade liberalisation and the implications for social and economic rights.

**Structural Adjustment and Economic and Social Rights**

IMF programmes and policies since the emergence of the external debt crisis of the 1970s can be summed up into two words: “contain” and “secure”. As a result, the structural adjustment programmes implemented by both the Bank and the Fund have straitjacketed governments and blocked their ability to provide meaningful social welfare programmes to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in society. To a certain extent SAPs not only have led to governments’ inability to protect, promote and fulfill social and economic rights but may itself violate these rights.

Between 1980 and 1989 there were a total of 241 World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programmes implemented in Africa (Bangura, 1994). Yet recent evidence show that at best only a modest growth of about 2.5 per cent occurred between 1980 and 1991, and that no significant difference exists between the growth rates of 1980-1985, when the programmes were being launched, and 1985-1991, the period when the reforms were expected to yield greater positive results (Bangura, 1994). Apart from ensuring the continued flow of debt service to foreign creditors, the other major thrusts of SAPs (especially in Latin America and the Caribbean) have been to further re-orient the economies of heavily indebted economies towards the global market and to create the conditions for further penetration of foreign capital in core parts of the economy.

**Anatomy of Structural Adjustment Programmes**

Typically, SAPs involve a five pronged attack of 1) devaluation; 2) assorted free market policies, market determined prices, elimination of subsidies on basics, a freeze on wages, elimination of restrictions on the movements of capital; 3) cuts in government spending; 4) privatisation; and 5) export promotion.
Devaluation increases domestic inflation, worsens the terms of trade and causes food prices to skyrocket.

Free market engineering worsens this effect as it causes both prices and profits to spiral upwards even as wages and real income stagnate. This coupled with weakened social services, the closure of schools, hospitals, health clinics and the sale of government enterprises also wreaked havoc fragile social and economic environment.

Cuts in government spending which are part and parcel of SAPs usually have their most dramatic effect on social services. There are direct effects on employment as well when budget cuts result in civil servants layoffs. Privatisation reduces government assets and control of vital sectors of the economy and opens them to market competition. Too often, this bring about ownership by foreign capital, and capitalisation, of key industries. Generally, privatisation is promoted as the most efficient and less costly way to deliver services, in terms of government budget. This does not always turn out to be true as private enterprises may either be unable to provide services at a reasonable cost to consumers – thus discontinue the services or raise their prices – or continue to rely on direct or indirect payments from the government. Thus all that has happened is a switch from government expenditures for direct public service to for-profit private sector.

Export promotion which puts emphasis on cash crop production over food production may increase hunger and malnutrition, since it diverts resources from the production of food for local consumption. With declining terms of trade there is a change in the internal distribution of resources between urban and rural areas, between and within families, and between men and women. (See the discussion on trade liberalisation, below, for more details on this issue).

Gender and Structural Adjustment

When it comes to SAPs women are affected in at least four significant ways:

(1) Increased household responsibilities: since they are the primary caretakers of families, women’s domestic responsibilities increase. Because of the rise in food prices, they must intensify “home” food preparation; they also have to increase their search for water and fuel.

(2) Increased outside work activities: in times of crisis many women are abandoned by their partner and must become primary, or sole, wage earners. Even
when the traditional family is intact, women find that they must make up for the shortfall between rising costs for food and declining family income. In either case, many women have to work more in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Given cuts in government budgets and the concurrent lay-offs, many women are forced to seek employment in the sweatshops of the export processing zones or so-called maquiladoras. The realities of women’s lives in these factories are well documented.

(3) Increased morbidity and mortality: Within the contexts of developing countries, reduction in government social welfare expenditures may range from simple reduction in staffing to shortage of medical supplies and to the outright closures of clinics and hospitals, particularly in rural areas. Women, at a time when they need it most – whether from breathing poisonous gases in the EPZs, or because of malnourishment – have limited access to urgently needed health care and medicine.

One of the most significant impacts of SAP in this regard has been the declining share of per capita expenditures on health care in LDCs budgets. For example, Senegale’s national expenditures for health fell in real terms from 1980 to 1990, a direct result of IMF stabilisation measures. In 1968-69 it was 9% of the budget, by 1991 it had fallen to 5% and by 1994 it was less than 5% of the budget which is considerably below WHO’s recommended minimum of 9% (Fall, 1998). In contrast, foreign debt service payment has remained at least 50% of budgetary expenditures.

Decline in national health care expenditures by the government has significant implication for Senegalese women, since in Senegal health care expenditures rank second after food in household budget. This has prompted economists such as Fall (1996) to argue that “cuts in health care represents a direct tax on the revenue, labour and working hours of women”.

(4) Lack of access to education and training. As well as health care expenditures, education expenditures are another easy target for budget reduction. In many developing country one of the most pervasive effect of structural adjustment and stabilising programmes has been the reduction in educational opportunities for girls and boys. This has translated into reduction in the number of schools available, overcrowding and decline in the quality of teaching and teacher training. A case in point is Senegal, where reductions in budget allocations to education has led to the introduction of “double flux” system whereby teachers are forced to teach up to one hundred students in two shifts (Fall, 1998). This has lead to over-work and exhaustion of teachers in the educational system. This practise, though
discontinued in wealthy areas, is still widespread in poor and rural communities (Fall, 1998).

**Structural Adjustment and Economic and Social Rights**

Many countries of the South are now in their second decade of structural adjustment programmes, and yet the living conditions of the poor and the marginalized have not improved significantly. For some it has indeed worsened. Both the IMF and the World Bank have powerful influence on the social and economic environment that is necessary to improve the living standards of the poor in LDCs. To the extent that their power, influence and resources are not directed towards the objective of securing the basic social and economic rights of the poor, these institutions are not only not promoting sustainable development, they may in fact be directly violating economic and social rights. (We will address this issue of SAPs and Economic and Social rights in the concluding section). For now we will examine the similarities and differences between the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and the IMF and the trade liberalisation policies of WTO in terms of impacts on poverty and development.

**WTO, Trade Liberalisation and Economic and Social Rights**

The World Trade Organisation is the institution in charge of overseeing the implementation of the Uruguay Round Agreements on trade liberalisation. The WTO wants to create an image of itself as a quasi judicial entity, impartial and isolated from public debates with regard to issues such as environmental protection, poverty eradication and gender equality. It seeks therefore to project itself as the “supreme court” of the international trading system. However, the reality is that trade policy-making is also a political and social process that does have tremendous impact on national social, economic and environmental priorities.

Indeed trade liberalisation has direct employment (it may create or cause job losses), consumption (it may bring new cheaper goods from abroad but it may also destroy local markets for goods) and budgetary effects (the reduction or elimination of tariffs may mean less revenue for the government). Trade liberalisation is not simply about the elimination of tariffs and quotas but also involves a whole set of apparatus that revolve around maintaining competitive market structure such as making labour and financial markets more flexible, eliminating barriers to foreign capital and relaxing government control of the market. It therefore strongly affects governments, macroeconomic and social policies. Furthermore, there are mutually reinforcing links between the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the IMF and the World Bank. All three of these institutions are fundamentally committed to the ideology of free trade. In fact trade
liberalisation is an essential feature of structural adjustment programs.

Anatomy of Trade Liberalisation Programs and Policies

Trade liberalisation is a process that opens up national economies to free flows of goods, services and movements of capital but not labour. Historically, trade liberalisation has occurred through bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements to lower tariffs and non-tariff barriers on cross-border trade. This usually goes together with parallel agreements on the treatment of foreign direct and portfolio investments. Since 1995 the main broad umbrella for trade liberalisation have been the Uruguay Round of General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade with specific components such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), etc. The Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) – now being negotiated by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – will provide yet another instrument for trade and investment liberalisation. All of these instruments work to promote and protect the rights of transnational corporations, and yet no attempt has been made to hold them accountable for any potential injurious effect of their activities.

To understand the logic of free trade, we must explore the principle of comparative advantage. This is best illustrated by Mehrene Laruede’s tale of two countries in isolation from each other: Riceland and Beanland. Before the discovery of boats, both countries produce their own rice and beans. But Riceland which is rich in water produces rice but has difficulty producing beans. On the other hand, Beanland is much drier and beans grow there without much difficulty; rice is however a troublesome product for Beanland.

The invention of boats allows Beanlanders and Ricelanders to discover each other. Cross-border trade in rice and beans develops. Ricelanders specialise in the production of rice, the product that they can produce best, and exchange the surplus for beans from Beanlanders who in turn specialise in bean (the product that they are best at producing). Everybody is happy. “Wait”, you say, “it simply cannot be that easy?” “What if, say, Riceland was better at producing both beans and rice? What would happen to Beanland?” Nothing negative says free traders: there would still be a basis for trade. Rational maximising Ricelanders would still specialise in rice production since it would still be able to produce rice cheaper than beans; thus leaving Beanland with something to trade.

Simple, isn’t it? So what is the problem? Ah! Enters reality, which as usual is a bit more complex. Won’t the former bean producers in Riceland starve to death? What about the rice producers in Beanland? What are they to do?
Maybe the government in Riceland should restrict the imports of beans to protect bean farmers, say the protectionists. Wrong move, say the free traders, protectionist measures will only raise prices and create inefficient use of resources. Free trade in rice and beans is still the best option. The winners should simply compensate for the losers. How they will do this is usually overlooked. (This might involve some kind of income redistribution scheme through the tax system.)

Simple though it may be, this example does illustrate how free trade is supposed to work. This basic framework of the law of comparative advantage has been underpinning world trade and payments for the last fifty years. This law gives rise to the fancy economic arguments for free trade that is the root of the trade policies of the U.S., the E.U., the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO.

The trade pattern between developing and developed countries is based on the law of comparative advantages which has engendered an international division of labour whereby (at least, up until the 1970s) developing countries specialised in providing primary products on the world market in exchange for manufactured products. Since the 1970s there has been a shift in this – assisted in part by structural adjustment programmes – with developing countries now adding cheap female labour to their comparative advantages. This has resulted in the relocation of some manufacturing processes in these countries, and in a shift in the pattern of trade. However, this is confined to a few developing countries in Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean.

In order to ensure this pattern of specialisation (the international division of labour), the international trading system has established certain rules of the games and institutions to enforce these rules. One such institution is the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (now the WTO). The GATT was established to institutionalise free trade based on comparative advantages. Two of its fundamental principles are non-discrimination (most favoured nation) and reciprocity. Non-discrimination obligates trading nations to treat all their trading partners alike. So if, for example, Beanland reduces tariffs on goods imported from Riceland, Beanland is also to extend the same privileges to all of its other trading partners. Riceland and the other trading partners are also expected to reciprocate by lowering taxes on Beanland’s goods.

Preferential Trading Arrangements, or PTA’s, (such as the European single market and NAFTA) allow a country or a group of countries to single out some of their trading partners and offer them special deals which they do not have to automatically extend to others. These preferential trading arrangements come in many
forms: Free Trade Areas such as NAFTA and EFTA which involves the elimination of trade barriers between the parties but wherein each party can impose its own trade barrier on third parties; Custom Union, such as the Benelux and European Community, which involves the elimination of trade barriers complemented by the adoption of common external barriers for third parties; and Common Market such as the European Union involves unification of all economic policies and free movement of labour and capital. Whether in the form of preferential trading arrangements or through multilateral negotiations, all trade rules must be coherent with the framework of the Uruguay Round/WTO process. Hence the WTO has tremendous influence on the institutional and rule-based factors that affect the pattern and direction of trade flows.
Gender, WTO and Trade Liberalisation

At present the WTO is gender blind and it policies are assumed to have gender neutral effects. But they do not. The WTO’s emphasis on export promotion will have profound effects on women workers (in the formal, informal and household sectors), as well as on women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises. Some of these effects will be positive, some will be negative, which effect will dominate will depend on women’s and civil society’s abilities to intervene in the process to ensure that necessary and sufficient attention is paid to poverty eradication and social development.

WTO’s trade liberalisation policies may have differential effects on women and men in terms of social burden, earnings, employment, and poverty. This can be closer examined by unraveling the complex intertwine as well as the reinforcing effect of WTO trade regime on gender inequality and gender biases and their impacts on women’s role in social reproduction, women’s position in labour markets and the market access problem that some women will face with free trade.

Social reproduction.
According to UNDP’s Human Development Report (1995), in 1993 women contributed over $11 trillion worth of household work to the world economy. This is in addition to their contribution to subsistence agriculture, informal sector activities and subcontracting production of multinational corporations. Addition-ally, in most OECD countries women’s work burden is about 7-28% more than men. In most LDC’s it averages 20% more (in rural areas). In both developed and developing countries about 2/3 of women’s work goes unrecorded, compared to only about 1/3 (1/4 in LDC’s) of men’s work.

Therefore, the starting point for understanding women’s role in the global economy and the impact of trade liberalisation on this role must be assessing women’s unpaid labour. For women’s unpaid, undervalued and unrecognised labour in social reproduction – production and maintenance of labour, care for the elderly, nurturing of the sick, and maintenance of community via volunteer activities, etc. – is the lifeblood of all economies. In other words, women’s labour in the household and community care-giving is central to the process of accumulation and, along with natural resources, are the effective ingredients in the so-called “magic” of the market.

Both international trade and domestic trade facilitates the process of output that is created, building on the contribution from the household sphere. What the market disposes of (as distortions or drags on competitiveness) simply ends up in the household sector – inwomen’s lap. This also includes attempts to re-allocate
state expenditures from social welfare programs towards the market. All of this results in the intensification of women’s labour time in the care-giving sphere of the economy. Women must spend more energy on child rearing, adult caring, adjusting to the emotional cost of men who have been shunned by the market. In the most benign case the reward for absorbing the emotional backlash of angry and frustrated men is increased work load and mental stress and, in the worst case, abuse and violence.

Additionally, for governments, tax revenues are drastically altered because tariffs are reduced or eliminated in order to facilitate free trade (as with the structural adjustment programs discussed above). Governments will usually target social expenditures for reduction. Thus many governments will be unable to provide basic social services such as clean water, health care, etc. Women’s unpaid work also increases when the prices of basic goods and services rise when, as a part of its market liberalisation package, the government privatises previously owned government agencies which used to produce these services or eliminates price controls on such goods and services. This effect is also exacerbated whenever trade liberalisation results in government shifting resources to the export sector to create conditions which are favourable to exporters and foreign investment at the expense of domestic needs and social development. Since these needs do not disappear but are simply shifted to the household, the effect of WTO trade liberalisation prescriptions may be to exacerbate inequality – that already exist in many economies – in social and economic relations between men and women.

Labour market
It is no secret that over the last fifteen years or so global competitiveness has been predicated on the absorption of female labour in both the formal and informal economies of the world. Currently, because of the gender division of labour, women have been located in the labour intensive sectors of the economy and, in some cases, the government sector. As a result, many women are trapped in export processing zones where they gain very little skills to advance them in other professional areas. WTO process may further reinforce the reliance and exploitation of cheap female labour. Thus instead of supporting the advancement of women new trade policies may instead increase the biases against women and keep women trapped in marginal occupations.

Evidence to support these assertions are beginning to appear in the literature and in NGO reports. A few examples should more than make the point:

- Moreno Fontes (quoted in Mejia, 1997) reports that flexible forms of employment (casual and sub-contracted) remunerated by the hour and non-remunerated
have increased in Mexico and other Latin American countries. This is also accompanied by rise in sweatshops and homework. Women are also likely to have increased activities in casual work and street selling.

- Activist Elizabeth Tang reports that in South Korea and Hong Kong “the status of women has actually deteriorated as they become increasingly marginalised and come to represent a high proportion of the informal sector in the labour market”. This situation is due to the emergence of temporary work and part time work (as light industries have shifted to countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam where labour costs are low).

- Women workers represent 80% of workers in the clothing sector and 50% of workers in the textile sectors in South Africa. Since 1996 trade liberalisation has led to decreased duties on clothing and by 2002 it is expected to fall to 40% on clothing. During the same period clothing producers decreased from 1,086 to 980 with 15,000 jobs lost. This was due to competition from cheap imports as well as to the relocation of firms to neighbouring states where “wages are lower, productivity higher and trade unions weaker because of job losses” (McQuene, p19). As elsewhere in the developing countries, sub-contracting and home-working are on the rise. Ironically the increased labour force for sub-contracted work to home-based workers are retrenched women workers from clothing factories.

Another important labour market effect of trade liberalisation is the change in labour market regulations that it engenders. In many cases these changes may alter the bargaining position of workers vis-à-vis wages and social benefits thereby reinforcing existing trends of wage inequalities, increasing hazardous conditions and climate in the work place dominated by women workers (Sen, 1996).
Once again another example from Mexico makes the point:

“… the clear increase of employment and work flexibilisation in the Mexican industry is characterised in particular by a high reduction of real wages and increasing wage differentials (and a) broadening gap between the highest and the lowest wages (Meija, p.7). As pointed by Rocio Meija, “if we assume that most women are in the lower wage category, there are no chances for improving their conditions in the short and medium term.” (ibid.)

**Gender based Market Access Problem and the Deterioration of the internal (women’s) agricultural market**

It is widely noted that in many African and Asian countries, existing gender inequalities and gender biases have shunted women into home-based or food production. Export promotion and trade liberalisation programmes tend to simply build on these inequalities since the areas usually earmarked for increased access to credit, tax breaks and other favourable treatments are crops and industries in which men are dominant. Very rarely are export promotion schemes designed to improve markets in which women dominate so that women too can benefit from export growth.

For example, the South African government’s Department of Trade and Industry paid over 53% of its Rand3.5 billion (1995/1996) budget to large South African manufacturers who exported in terms of its General Export Incentive Scheme programme. In contrast the Small Business Development where women have a potential to play an important role received only 2.2% (Mohau Pheko, 1998).

Furthermore, the competitive thrust of trade liberalisation strategy is to eliminate barriers to the entry of foreign companies whose goods will out sell those of women who are generally small scale producers using out-of-date technology. Thus cheap imported food and agricultural products will drive women farmers out of business. Evidence of these effects are beginning to emerge. For example:

- Teresita Oliverso of AMIHAN, a national federation of peasant women in the Philippines, reported (Third World Resurgence, No 86) that the Philippines’ commitment to the WTO has led to reduction of tariffs and free entry of all agricultural products into the country, which is threatening the “traditional products of the peasants such as onions, garlic and potatoes (which) were earlier protected by law”.

- Oliverso also points out that one of the pivot of the Philippines’ trade liberalisation strategy was the removal of to farmers (required by the IMF) which is now “undermining the prices of the products of local farmers.”
Women in the Philippines, as well as in most other Asian and African countries, tend to dominate in vegetable production and poultry/livestock production which provide supplementary income. But precisely these sectors are vulnerable to shifting trade liberalisation winds. For example Senegalese women activists report that local Senegalese women farmers are facing stiff competition in tomato, garlic and onions from cheap, heavily government subsidised imports from the European Union (Women Activists, Geneva 1998).

In some cases, foreign companies may also obtain access to the most productive land, pushing women producers into less and less fertile land. In the Philippines, where Oliveros argues that government, as part of its trade liberalisation strategy, is redirecting its agriculture to meet the demands of the new world trade regime, this means the wholesale shifting of production from basic staple food (rice and corn) to high value export crops, such as bananas, eucalyptus and cut flowers. The transformation of this land not only has resulted in large scale evictions of peasant and small farmers, many of whom are women, but is also a great threat to local food security. It also is a potential health hazard for women and their families because these “high valued crops require intensive use of chemicals for increased productivity” (Oliveros, p.36).

What these stories are pointing out is that untempered trade liberalisation, not only runs the risk of further marginalising women from key activities in the national economy, but may itself engender significant violations of women’s social and economic rights. When liberalisation proceeds without paying necessary attention to social and economic costs, it reduces people’s ability to secure basic food, clothes and shelter. Without basic necessity to ensure a dignified life some people may be forced to make trades of desperation, such as tacit participation in the abuse of their children who labour under abhorrent working conditions in whatever paying production activity is available; or the parents, themselves, may have to accept conditions that abuse and humiliate them.

This is already going on in, for example, the Philippines and Tanzania. In the Philippines, as reported by Oliveros, programs such as land conversion for tourism projects, and the shifting of land into high value products are forcing some women into prostitution. Other women are forced to work in areas where they become vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment: caddies on golf courses, domestic helpers, hostesses in entertainment establishments such as Karaoke bars and beer houses. Meanwhile last year (1997) in Tanzania, the government proposed legislation to privatise and sell-off lands that it formerly owned but which was used on a communal basis. Tanzanian women activists are concerned
that this will throw at least 80% of women off the land. At that time the government had not made any provision to accommodate the women (Reported by a Tanzania activist at the WTO/UNCTAD Seminar Sept. 1997.)

* SAP, Trade Liberalisation and Men and Women’s Economic and Social Rights
It is widely acknowledged that trade liberalisation has generated a tremendous increase in wealth and prosperity. However, it is also acknowledged and demonstrated that there is widespread increase in poverty, social exclusion and inequality in income distribution within and among countries over the same period. Yet, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its main counterparts, the Fund and the Bank single-mindedly pursue trade liberalisation policies without taking into consideration their potential for violating the economic and social rights of the poor. Fact is that these three institutions have undue influence over the economic environment that is important for men and women to be able to fulfil their economic and social rights.

This is especially important in the case of women’s economic and social rights, since both trade liberalisation and structural adjustment programmes have a potential for exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities and gender biases in local and national economies. Therefore, through enforcing trade rules and practices which are not gender aware and sensitive, all three institutions may have detrimental effects on the economic and social status of women and (girls) who constitute 70% of the world’s poorest people.

* La bibliographie se trouve en fin d’ouvrage.