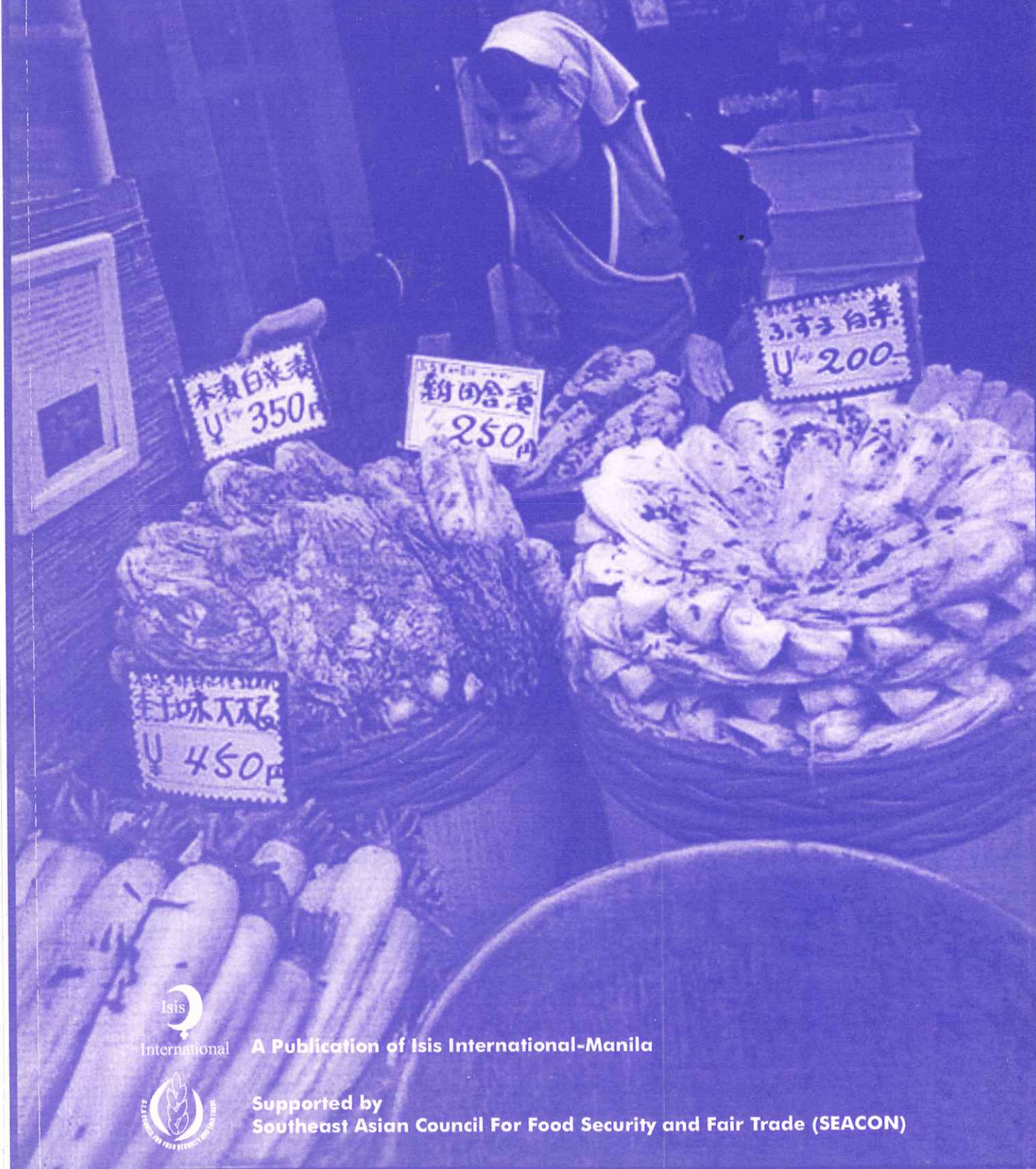


NO SHORT-CUT TO FOOD SECURITY: A WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE



Isis
International

A Publication of Isis International-Manila



Supported by
Southeast Asian Council For Food Security and Fair Trade (SEACON)

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PREFACE

The theme "No Shortcut to Food Security: From a Women's Perspective" has been an Isis advocacy for the past few years. This advocacy tries to capture the point that for ensuring food security, society must ensure environmental sustainability and an equitable distribution of wealth for both women and men. The foundation must be built on the qualitative aspects of life. Without these elements, the next century will breed only greater hunger, deprivation and conflicts. This foundation must include empowerment, self-reliance in the context of participatory democracy, access to essential resources and services, means and access to information for decision-making diversification, a reshaping of sexual division of labour, institutions which safeguard civil and social rights, especially for women, and peaceful alternatives for social conflict resolution. (*No Short Cut to Food Security: From a Woman's Perspective*, Nancy Arcellana, Isis International-Manila Information Pack on Women and Food Security, 1996). In short, there are no quick fixes or short cuts to food security.

It is with this advocacy that Isis International-Manila has conducted this research. In previous years Isis has produced reports and publications that examined obstacles to food security vis a vis globalisation, state initiatives for liberalisation and the macro impacts of economics and politics. This time we felt that it was important to take a look at what other obstacles women encounter in carrying out their role to produce and provide food for their families.

This research tries to look at women's status in four Southeast Asian countries: Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and Laos—pertaining to the role of women in ensuring food security. Drawing from data relevant to these countries, the paper looks at the impact of international restructuring and neoliberal policies on food production. We wanted to identify what impact gender blindness has when translating policies and programs. The first two countries are viewed as democratic and have subscribed to the global free trade models. The other two are under pressure to do the same but until now have maintained a socialist model with initial steps to opening up to market pressures. The question we wanted to know was how women fare in these systems. How markedly different is their quality of life and what obstacles do they encounter that are similar or different.

The research was conducted from November 1998 to January 1999. It is a survey and analysis of existing secondary materials. It is by no means an exhaustive survey of articles and reports. Its main goal was to prepare for the "Peoples' Response to the Food Security Crisis in Southeast Asia Conference," 24-25 February 1999.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last two decades have witnessed much greater internationalisation of the production and sale of commodities and services and a much greater flow of capital across borders than at any other time in world history. These decades have also seen a massive decline in living standards and a growing inequality between income and asset distribution.

The Asian economic crisis has further increased poverty in Southeast Asia, as it affected the production, availability and accessibility of basic food products.

This has been accompanied by a lack of development in the necessary level of industrialisation in agriculture. There has also been a further deregulation of the agricultural sector and a lowering of tariffs on agricultural products leading to food import dependency of the "Third World."

In the non-capitalist economies—Vietnam and Laos—initial trends show that Vietnam has, so far, weathered the crisis better than its ASEAN neighbors have. But the full impact of the crisis is perhaps yet to be felt.

Vietnam and Laos are in the midst of economic restructuring which have been going on since the late 1980s. New economic policies in these countries has introduced market mechanisms in some areas of the economy reduce the state-owned sector to less than one-fifth of the GDP; lifted price control mechanisms; eliminated most direct subsidies; 'liberalised' exchange rates; and 'opened up' to more foreign trade and investment.

The initial impact of the 'reforms' leaves gaps in social services with negative consequences for women. It also widens rural and urban disparities as development assistance benefits often favour urban and semi-urban areas.

In the four countries studied a big concentration of women are in agriculture. In Vietnam and Laos, over 70 percent of economically active women are in agriculture. In the Philippines and Thailand they are concentrated both in the agriculture and service sectors.

In most countries women work about twice the unpaid time men do. Statistics for housework and subsistence work are hard to come by for the developing countries. But the trends in Southern Asia give some indication of the general pattern.

Women still take the main responsibility for the care of the young in the family. Women's reproductive activity, which is a fundamental question of the reproduction of the human species, is virtually ignored in statistics measuring women's work. The reluctance to include women's unpaid housework (including reproductive work) results in women's participation in agriculture being largely under-reported.

A majority of the poor in the rural areas, both men and women, are still excluded from the fundamental right to land. In fact, the concentration of wealth in developing countries is inextricably linked to the concentration of the ownership of land in the hands of a few ruling elite families. Poor rural women have been even further excluded and marginalised in their rights to land.

Women accede the little rights they have to their husband, which could be a 'trade-off' for achieving domestic 'harmony'.

In many countries large areas of forests have been set aside for commercial forestry or agricultural interests thus contributing to deforestation and the scarcity of fuelwood. With the degradation of the forests, due to their role in gathering fuelwood, women are more likely to be burdened by fuelwood

scarcity than men are. The FAO says that nearly 80 percent of women in 18 Asian countries are affected by fuelwood scarcity.

Deforestation also affects household food security in many other ways. Women's gathering activities are essential parts of the family diet. Much of what they gather is also processed or marketed, bringing in a supplementary cash income. During periods of famine and shortage women also use the forests to gather buffer foods which can be crucial to family survival.

Increased water pollution is worsening problems of water scarcity. Women, as collectors, users and managers of water in the household, as well as farmers of irrigated and rainfed crops play a significant and, in some areas of the world, even crucial role in water management. Women also have a considerable knowledge of water resources, including storage methods, access and reliability of water.

The literacy rate for women in three of the four countries surveyed is quite high. Laos is the exception with a very low literacy rate for women. However, the statistics in themselves do not tell the full story that included the quality of education, attainment of skills and accomplishments of females.

The knowledge and skills gap is multifaceted.

- Rural women are at a disadvantage in educational opportunities.
- The quality of education is poorer in rural areas.
- They have little access to appropriate food production information.
- Their knowledge and experience is often devalued or ignored.
- When women are educated it is to integrate them into the current models of globalisation and their use is relevant as it enhances such models, and;
- Women's heavy workload discourages their participation and interest in any activities outside of the housework, child rearing, and farming chores.

Women's access to credit is a part of a longer-term problem of inadequate credit availability for small farmers. Women, however, face particular problems, resulting in them receiving only a minor share of total agricultural credit even in countries where they play a dominant role in food production.

Some of the factors that limit women's access to credit are:

- Their inability to meet collateral requirements demanded by formal lending institutions such as banks, due to their lack of access to land, cattle and other tools of production.
- Complicated application procedures, which alienate women.
- Extension programs mainly oriented to men.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is very clear that women are disenfranchised from the big "macroeconomic" picture, but on the other hand, when it comes to women, "small" is not necessarily "beautiful" either. Going down to the micro-economic or community and family level is not an automatic panacea. There are real social obstacles operating within the family and community that continue to marginalise women.

Change in social and cultural attitudes has to come from within the community. It cannot be bureaucratically imposed from above or from outside. The need is for a strategy that intends to advance the status of rural women's needs to integrate the macro-economic-socio-political picture with the micro-economic-socio-political details. Also, issues of rights, access and control have to be addressed at all levels of intervention.

An important area for further study is the state of the grassroots organisations of women in the four countries and the region—how to develop a powerful grassroots movement of women who take on these their own issues and assert themselves on the “powers that be.” Women need to be involved in the existing rural grassroots campaigns and encourage them to have a voice in the decision-making and leadership.

Priority areas for policy development and campaigns which are crucial to addressing women's issues to food security.

1. Land Reform

A comprehensive land reform program must address the issue of land rights for women. Such a program must ensure: equal rights to land; women's access to land; and other resources to make land productive; women's participation in decision-making over tenurial and productivity issues. At the same time, community groups working in the rural areas need to ensure that women who have land tenure hold on to it and do not give into family and community pressures.

2. Education and Training

A comprehensive region-wide education program with two major thrusts:

- a. For women to ensure their literacy and access to ongoing education and training. For all educational facilities (state and community based) to include childcare facilities.
- b. Gender sensitivity training at all levels of the government and related institutions; including educational institutions from the primary to tertiary level. Gender awareness raising campaign in the media, in schools, in the communities, community based organisations and community organisers, in factories, in arts and culture, aimed at raising women's social status.

3. Promotion of alternative forms of agriculture that is based on biodiversity and takes women's needs into consideration.

4. The democratisation of the economy and politics at all levels of society's institutions—from the state to the family so that women and other marginalised people are fully involved and included.

It is also important to consider region-wide issue-based campaigns, based on concrete demands, which can be conducted at the grassroots includes the women in the communities. This strategy needs to involve an information network that ensures that regional advocacy's are grounded in the issues that affect the local communities and that the information of the macro is transmitted to the grassroots organisations to further their understanding and involvement in macro issues.

In addition, community based organisations working with rural communities, need to assess their indicators of development and include in the evaluation the social impact of development on women.

NO SHORT-CUT TO FOOD SECURITY: A WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

The last two decades have witnessed a much greater internationalisation of the production and sale of commodities and services and a much bigger flow of capital across borders than at any other time in world history. The combined turnover of the major stock markets in a single day is equivalent to the turnover in international trade in one year.

Since the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1970s which radically opened the economies of the 'Third World,' the IMF and the World Bank have become the most influential economic actors in close to 100 'Third World' and Eastern European economies. The signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)-Uruguay Round in 1994 and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) a year later extensively expanded the deregulation of agriculture and the set of rules for world trade.

The last decades have also seen a massive decline in living standards, a growing inequality between income and asset distribution and a sharpening scissor effect between 'town' and 'country' in the 'Third World.' The 1998 UN Human Development Report notes that "the world's richest people have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion, equal to the annual income of the poorest 47 percent of the world's people or 2.5 billion.

"The three richest people have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the 48 least developed countries. ... the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women and sanitation for all is roughly \$40 billion per year. This is less than four percent of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world. "Industrial countries have 147 of the richest 225 people (\$645 billion combined), and developing countries 78 (\$370 billion). Africa has just two (\$3.7 billion)."

Even the World Bank was forced to admit in its 1995 World Development Report that "Convergence is a notion dear to economists, who like its close fit with theory [the theory of perfect competition in a level-playing field where all commodity owners are equal—RM], and abhorred by populists in rich countries, who see it as a threat to their incomes.

Past experience, however, supports neither the hopes of the former nor the fears of the latter. Overall, divergence, not convergence, has been the rule."

Divergence certainly is the rule. Average per capita income of the richest countries was 11 times that of the poorest in 1870. It rose to 38 times in 1965 and as much as 58 times in 1985. The report also admits that "Inequalities between men and women, between ethnic groups, and between geographic regions are particularly tenacious ... Poor regions such as the state of Chiapas in Mexico, usually stay relatively poor even when the economy as a whole expands."

So while there has been an increased internationalisation of production and trade, distribution has been extremely uneven in all areas—investment, trade, wealth and decision-making power. In fact the concentration of capital ownership, and therefore wealth, has increased. In 1992, for example, the total stock of foreign direct investment (FDI) throughout the world was US\$2 trillion. The largest 100 transnational corporations accounted for a third of this stock.

Further, the geographical distribution of this stock of FDI was highly uneven. About 75 percent of this was located in the industrialised countries (mainly North America, Western Europe and Japan which account for only 14 percent of the world's population). Of the remaining 25 percent, about 66 percent was located in the 10 most important "developing" countries—Argentina, Brazil, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore ((Paul Hirst and Grahan Thompson). These countries account for 29 percent of the world's population. However, by including China with a population of 1.2 billion people, these figures underestimate the real level of unevenness in the global distribution of FDI. FDI flows into China have been mainly concentrated in eight Chinese coastal provinces, plus Beijing province (Doug Lorimer, *Green Left Weekly*). When this is factored in it emerges that 91.5 percent of global FDI stock is concentrated in areas of the world inhabited by only 28 percent of its population.

When it comes to world trade, 69 percent of the world's exports went to the industrialised countries, particularly to the triad of North America, Japan and Western Europe. About 14 percent percent of the world's exports went to the 10 most important 'developing' countries. That is, 83 percent of world trade was between areas of the world inhabited by only 28 percent of its population. In other words, the great majority of countries of the world, inhabited by nearly three-quarters of its population or about 3.8 billion people, were not only written off the map as far as foreign direct investment was concerned, they were completely marginalised as far as world trade is concerned. The main way they are 'integrated' into the global economy is through the annual tribute of \$US40 billion they make in debt repayments and servicing to the banks and governments of the triad.

Samir Amin, director of the African Bureau of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal, describes these countries as the "Fourth World." In his article "The new capitalist globalisation—problems and perspectives" published in the *Alternatives Sud*, Amin explains that "At the end of the Second World War, capitalism as it actually existed as a world system displayed two basic characteristics inherited from its historical formation ... [the] national bourgeois states ... [which] formed the centres of the world system ... [and

the] polarisation between these centres and the peripheries, since the centres had had their industrial revolution one after the other during the 19th century, had taken the form of an almost complete contrast between industrialisation of the centres and lack of industry in the peripheries.

"However, in the course of the postwar cycle, these two features were gradually eroded. The peripheries, after winning back their political independence, came into the industrial age, albeit in an uneven manner, such that [it] gave way to a growing differentiation between a semi-industrialised Third World and a Fourth World which had not yet begun its industrial revolution."

Latin American academic James Petras extends this thesis further and argues that "globalisation from the beginning was associated with imperialism." In a paper presented in March 1996 at the Citizens Facing Globalisation Conference in Santiago, Chile, Petras argued that there were three phases of this globalisation. The first phase was "the conquest and exploitation of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The white colony settlements in North America and Australia were all instances of 'globalisation'."

"The second pattern of globalisation was built around inter-imperial trade. ... Thirdly, globalisation involves international trade (as distinct from pillage, extractive investments and loans). International exchanges of commodities link markets and classes in social hierarchies that give 'globalisation' its class character as an arena for class and trade conflict."

"The principal agencies today, the multinational corporations, fulfil the role played earlier by the trading companies, integrating and appropriating resources and exploiting cheap labor." Hence, the pillage and impoverishment of the "periphery" to enrich the imperial centres continue.

The Asian Economic Crisis

The Asian economic crisis, which some argue is a by-product of globalisation, has further increased poverty in Southeast Asia. For example, it has had a massive impact on the production, availability and accessibility of basic food products. In the Philippines, agricultural production dropped by a staggering 12.7 percent in the first half of 1998. In Malaysia, the volume of imported rice increased by about 13.5 percent in the first quarter of 1998 compared to that of the same period last year. In Indonesia, some 80 percent of animal husbandry enterprises have been closed due to lack of food for livestock.

The economic crisis has also forced food prices to rise dramatically. Over the past two years, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines have more than once raised the price of food. Prices of main items of food in these countries have increased by 10-20 percent. The crisis has also resulted in the restriction on the availability of loans even to buy food products and a decline in investments into agriculture and food production.

It has led to a certain level of instability in the global economy. The Asian crisis was soon followed by a major currency crisis in Russia, instability in the major economies of Latin

America, such as Brazil, and even the possibility of a global recession. Some analysis paint the scenario of a global crisis "with a regional trigger."

The Asian economic crisis has led to an ideological crisis surrounding the Newly-Industrialising Country (NIC) model, which is an export-oriented growth strategy. This is most clearly reflected in the debates, even amongst the establishment, on the role of the IMF and its economic prescriptions. But most importantly it has led to a severe political crisis of the ruling elite, the most striking being the resignation of former Indonesian President Suharto as a result of the mass movement and unrest, the splits in the Malaysian regime, and to a lesser extent, the resignation of government officials in Thailand and South Korea.

The economic crisis has sharpened the discussion around an alternative model of economic growth. One model being proposed is the Keynesian style, interventionist "state-capitalist" model. Some of its features are:

- appropriate controls on inflows and outflows of foreign capital
- growth financing through domestic savings and investment
- development focused around demand-driven, domestic market as its main stimulus
- strengthening the social and activist role of the state
- investment in all levels of education
- ecological sustainability.

However, this quest for economic models, must not and cannot leave out the political, the social and the cultural, all of which impact on the exploited and the oppressed—in particular the women. A Keynesian model that doesn't adequately address the political and social role of the state does not necessarily benefit women. Women, whose oppression is all-encompassing, cannot be indifferent to the nature of the state and society, as well as the economy that they are an integral part of. If the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) club suddenly decides to follow a Keynesian course and institutes a regional trade bloc, but the governments are still controlled by the Mahathirs and their ilk, women cannot be indifferent to the political nature of the beast. From a feminist point of view, an alternative "model" is not a genuine alternative unless it is also an alternative political and social model charting the future development of society.

Objectives of the research

This paper analyses the situation in four Southeast Asian countries—Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam and Laos—pertaining to the role of women in ensuring food security. Drawing from data relevant to these countries the paper argues that the international restructuring of capital witnessed in the last two decades, and the neoliberal economic policies pursued by governments internationally and regionally, have had a negative impact on agriculture and food production. Most importantly, the social consequences of these developments have been extremely harmful, in particular to the marginalised sectors of society, such as women.

Section II of the report entitled “Women and Agriculture” looks at the crucial roles that women in the four countries play in agriculture and food production. It argues that due to the gender blindness of statistical methodology, women’s role in food production is systematically under-reported. This gender blindness, translates into policies and programs which continue to ignore and marginalise women, much to their detriment and that of regional food security. The section also analyses key concerns of women in relation to agriculture and food production. The main concerns identified are: women’s land rights; ecological destruction (deforestation, water scarcity, pesticide use); biodiversity verses monoculture, knowledge and skills, and credit and subsidies. The section further argues that these are not only central issues for women, but that women historically, socially and culturally play an especially important role in these areas and are, therefore, central to ensuring food security.

Section III outlines broad areas for policy consideration of relevance to the region. It also draws on issue-based campaign proposals put forward by a range of workshops, seminars and conferences held in the recent period on the topic of food security.

SECTION I

The impact of 'globalisation' on agriculture

In the last decades, negative trends already apparent in agriculture since the 1970s have intensified. Throughout the world more and more farmers have lost their land and their livelihoods and moved to the urban slums in the cities. Land concentration has increased and large agribusiness transnational firms, have taken greater and greater control over agriculture.

British economics expert Susan George contends that "If food systems are seen as a chain, with seeds, fertiliser, machinery, and other inputs at one end, farmers at the middle, and post-harvest activities (storage, processing, delivery to consumers) at the other end, then it is clear that industry now controls both ends of the chain. The farmer, the man or woman in the middle, has less to say about agricultural policy than ever before and the smaller the farmer, the less he—and especially she—has a say."

The last two decades have seen a major restructuring of agriculture towards export-oriented production. Land and crop conversion schemes were pushed to shift from subsistence to commercial crop production, specifically of export-oriented crops. Government support was shifted to large-scale commercial agriculture, which marginalises small-scale farmers. In the Philippines, for instance, Republic Act 7900 (High Value Crops Development Act of 1995) provides incentives to agricultural business corporations to shift to export-crop production. Tax holidays, infrastructure support and bank loans are some of the incentives offered. Land and production capacity become more concentrated in the hands of a few landowners or corporations. This has led to the bankruptcy of many local farmers.

In Thailand, the number of family-based farms are declining and agribusinesses expanding. The family farm has become part of a contract-farming system linked up with big agricultural corporations. In both Philippines and Thailand, there have been declines in agricultural production and its relative importance to national output. Local agricultural production cannot compete in the global market. For these countries, the tendency is for an increased role of food imports in the near future.

In the Philippines, the situation leads to the increasing displacement of the structurally deficient agricultural sector that is unable to compete in the global market. There is a corresponding slump in growth rates of food crop production and a decline in the production of four traditional crops—rice, corn, sugarcane, and coconut. In Thailand, domestic producers of agricultural products, such as palm oil, soya oil, soya residues, coconut meat, onion, garlic, potatoes, raw silk thread and skimmed milk powder, are not protected. Their products are being outmoded by imported goods.

This has been accompanied by a lack of development of the necessary level of industrialisation in agriculture. This has meant inadequate investment into rural infrastructure such as farm-to-market roads and post-harvest facilities and into agricultural research and development that would help increase rural productivity. There has also been a further deregulation of the agricultural sector and a lowering of tariffs on agricultural

products leading to food import dependency of the "Third World," to the benefit of the imperialist centres and the big monopoly transnational corporations (TNCs).

The Blair House Accord which became the basis for GATT's agreement on agriculture was a deal between the US and the European Union aimed at regulating their agricultural competitions in third world country/region markets. The countries of the South had little, if any, substantive influence in determining the outcomes of GATT-UR. The agreement was presented to them on a "take it or leave it" basis.

While GATT mandated the reduction of US and European subsidies, critics say that the agreement has merely swapped one form of subsidisation for another. The agreement exempts US and Europe from 'direct income subsidies' which lead to an equivalent of 49 percent and 30 percent continuing effective subsidy in the respective countries. This amounts to maintaining agricultural systems permanently geared to overproduction in both the US and Europe.

All GATT members have committed themselves to opening up their markets to certain minimum levels of agricultural imports at low tariffs. GATT-UR has liberalized the importation of a wide range of agricultural commodities including foodstuffs, thereby opening the economy of the South to an influx of food imports. A report of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and World Bank estimates that food-importing countries will be paying four to seven percent more for their food as a consequence of the Uruguay Round Agreement while they lose concessional advantages in key export markets.

In 1994 and 1995 China grew more food than ever before, yet still imported 10 million tons of grain, plus 15 million tons more in 1996. These trends are particularly significant for the Southeast Asian region. According to the US Department of Agriculture, "high income Asia" like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, imports more food than any other region in the world—about 50 million tons of grain a year. To this list can be added Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam all of which have increasing needs and in some cases negligible amounts of food stocks. Meanwhile subsidies to local farmers are being cut back and domestic producers have no protection from cheap agricultural imports.

The export-oriented model of agricultural production and the resulting decline in food crop production, has led to food-importing countries becoming more dependent on the industrialised countries and on TNCs for their most important and basic food requirements. This import reliance on basic food stuffs undermines the role of national governments. The World Bank, WTO, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and TNCs become more influential in determining domestic development directions.

The trend has also been for international prices of food to rise. Net food-importing countries, which used to buy export-subsidised food from developed nations, now have to import food at international prices as export subsidies will no longer exist. However, availability of food supplies (for food-exporting countries) is not synonymous with food security. Many countries export food, but the majority of their citizens in remote,

mountainous areas, and areas not favorable for food production, are permanently threatened by hunger.

Social impact

Globalisation has resulted to the increasing displacement of small farmers from their land and impoverishment of the rural poor. The displacement has resulted in a massive increase in urban and overseas migration. There has been an increase in labour migration, particularly of women, from the agricultural to the industrial sector. In Thailand, over 80 percent of the workforce in the export industry are women, aged between 16 and 25 years old. They earn low wages. In the Philippines, peasant women and their families are displaced from agricultural activities and become domestic helpers in town centers and service workers in restaurants and the 'hospitality' industries which may include prostitution. The shifts in production patterns have led to the further marginalisation of women and their dislocation from their traditional sources of livelihood. The yearning for land and the question of land reform is very much a burning issue for the rural, semi-urban and urban poor for these countries.

The increasing degradation of the environment is also creating a serious and even critical impact on agriculture. Rapid industrialisation and the export-driven model of the region has led to acute pollution and depletion of soil and soil fertility, forests and fisheries. Rainfall and water patterns are undergoing severe disruptive changes and globalisation is taking its toll through extreme climatic changes.

In Thailand, the policy of promoting export of agricultural products to the world market has led to massive deforestation to make way for the cultivation of cash crops, such as tapioca and eucalyptus. The dumping of inappropriate technology, pesticides and banned chemicals which causes soil and water pollution, make the overall picture even more grim. The net effect of this environmental degradation and devastation is worsening food insecurity in the region.

Impact on non-capitalist economies

For the non-capitalist economies in Southeast Asia—Vietnam and Laos—initial indications show that Vietnam has, so far, weathered the crisis better than its ASEAN neighbours. For example, food production in Vietnam increased in 1998 and the Dong seems to have been better protected than other currencies. But the full impact of the crisis is perhaps yet to be felt and can affect the economy in the following way:

- Radical currency devaluation of its neighbours can make their exports internationally more competitive than Vietnam's;
- Loss of ASEAN export markets that Vietnam depends on;
- Worsening of the country's balance of trade and current account deficits;
- Reduction in FDI from countries such as South Korea.

Vietnam and Laos are in the midst of economic restructuring which have been going on since the late 1980s. The Economic Renewal or *doi moi* in Vietnam and the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in Laos involve introducing market mechanisms in some

areas of the economy. In Laos, the NEM has reduced the state-owned sector to less than one-fifth of the GDP; lifted price control mechanisms; eliminated most direct subsidies; 'liberalised' exchange rates; and 'opened up' to more foreign trade and investment.

Overall economic performance throughout the 1990s until mid-1995, had growth hovering around the 6.5 percent mark. Inflation was reduced from almost 60 percent in 1989 to under seven percent at the end of 1994, which then sharply increased again to 20 percent in 1995. After over five years of stability the national currency, the *kip*, declined rapidly by 28 percent from KN720 to KN925 to the dollar.

The initial impact of the 'reforms' are leaving gaps in social services with particularly negative consequences for women. It is also widening rural and urban disparities as development assistance primarily benefits urban and semi-urban areas where nine percent and 11 percent of the population reside.

The common perception is that Laos and Vietnam are 'transitional' economies—going from socialist-oriented to becoming capitalist economies. Also the context in which the term "transitional" is used invariably implies a value judgement that the two countries are moving towards something more superior to what they already have. However, a closer look at the scenario indicates that this assumption cannot be conclusively made.

Indications are that in Vietnam there is a debate within the Party and government on the level of market mechanisms versus state intervention. The 1996 Party Congress documents put forward the following emphasis on the various economic forms which make up the "multi-sector" economy: First, the need to "continue renewing and effectively developing the *State economic sector* for it to play properly its leading role." Second, to "broaden the diversified forms of *cooperative economy* of the working people in different trades on the basis of shares and direct labour contributed by the members, with distribution made according to labour outcome and shares, ensuring the principle of voluntariness, a democratic management mechanism, and transparency in terms of finances and business." Third, to "develop various forms of *State capitalist economy*, including cooperation and joint ventures between the State sector on one side, and local private capitalists or foreign capitalists on the other side in order to mobilise their large potentials in capital, technology, organisational and managerial skills ... to the benefit of our national construction." Fourth, to "help the *private, small-owner economy* overcome difficulties regarding capital, technology, market and management experience." Fifth, to "undertake policy measures to encourage the *private capitalist economy* to invest in branches and domains in keeping with the country's development objectives and strategy." To those familiar with the early period of Soviet economic development, the weight given to these various sectors implies a New Economic Policy in the style of the early model of Soviet development. However, the government has also decided to join the World Trade Organization.

Indications of a difference of opinion was also reflected in the reports presented at the Vietnam-ASEAN Food Security Conference held in November 1998 where some reports would emphasise the importance of state subsidies and general state intervention, while others emphasised the importance of market mechanisms.

Given the Asian economic crisis and the political and ideological crisis in its wake, the impact that this has on the evolution of the Vietnamese and Laotian economies is yet to be seen. It certainly offers them the unique opportunity to draw the lessons of the NIC economies. Hence, it would be more accurate to state that these economies are truly at the crossroads.

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Statistics for housework and subsistence work are hard to come by for the developing countries. But the trends in Southern Asia give some indication of the general pattern. (Table 3)

TABLE 3. Time use in three Southern Asian countries, 1989/92.

		Hours per week of economic activity			Hours/week of housework	Total work hours per week
		Paid	Subsistence	Total		
Bangladesh	Ages 15+ Female	14	8	22	31	53
	Male	38	3	41	5	46
India	Ages 18+ Female	28	7	35	34	69
	Male	43	4	47	10	57
Nepal	Ages 15+ Female	18	17	35	42	77
	Male	29	12	41	15	56

Source: Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat from National Studies (UN: *The World's Women 1995*)

Women and girls in these countries spend from three to five more hours per week in unpaid subsistence work than men—carrying water and wood, growing and processing primary agricultural products—and an additional 20-30 hours more per week than men in unpaid housework. According to these studies women spend 31 to 42 hours per week in unpaid housework while men spend between 5 and 15 hours per week. Women's total work hours range from 53 hours/week in Bangladesh to 77 hours/week in Nepal.

TABLE 4. Household labour profile in 60 *hmong* households in Xieng Khouang Province, Lao PDR, 1995.

Household work	Women	Men	Girls	Boys
Cutting trees for firewood		+		
Collecting firewood	+	+	+	+
Fetching water	+	-	+	+
Cleaning house	+	-		
Cooking	+	-		
Carrying food to field	+	-		
Care of the sick	+	+		
Washing clothes	+	+	+	
Care of the young	+	-	+	
Marketing for foods	+	-		
Marketing for durable goods	-	+		

Source: ADB Women in Development. Laos briefing paper, 1995

The situation for women in the developed countries in terms of the allocation of time to household tasks is not much better. In Australia and the United States the women do over

70 percent of the preparation of meals and childcare. In Japan 87 percent of the childcare work is done by women. (Table 5)

TABLE 5. Unpaid housework (% share of women and men), 1995.

	Preparing meals		Childcare		Shopping		Other housework		Total	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Australia—1990	75	25	78	22	61	39	53	47	64	36
US —1986	78	22	73	28	60	40	61	39	64	36
Sweden—1990/91	70	30	72	28	60	40	60	40	61	39
Russian Federation—1986	76	24	66	34	60	40	62	38	57	43
Japan —1991			87	12	79	21	94	6		
Korea—Republic of 1990	98	2	79	20	90	11	83	17	89	11

Source: UN, *The World's Women, 1995*

Despite some of these limited but nevertheless eye-opening findings, it is acknowledged in study after study that “according to international statistical standards, economic activity includes all work within the production boundary of the System of National Accounts (SNA). But [this] excludes unpaid housework from measurement of economic activity and production.” (UN)

Even the World Bank admits that “Women’s labour force participation continues to be strongly influenced by gender differences in the definition of work ... This is particularly relevant in the informal sector and in agriculture.”

There is also the whole area of women’s reproductive activity which includes childcare. Women still take the main responsibility for the care of the young in the family. The reproductive activity of women, which is a fundamental question of the reproduction of the human species, is virtually ignored in statistics measuring women’s work. The reluctance to include women’s unpaid housework (including reproductive work) results in women’s participation in agriculture being largely under-reported.

These qualifications in the data published by the above organisations are clearly a concession to feminist exposure of the gender blindness of prevailing statistical analysis. However, the same type of statistics get churned out, year in year out.

Why is this the case?

Women's land rights—ownership, access and control

Land is fundamental to agriculture. Land rights, therefore, is a fundamental right of the majority of agricultural toilers, who in the developing countries are still the overwhelming majority of the population. A majority of the poor in the rural areas, both men and women, are still excluded from this fundamental right to land. In fact, the concentration of wealth in developing countries is inextricably linked to the concentration of the ownership of land in the hands of a few ruling elite families.

“About 80 percent of the poor in Asia are landless peasants and indigenous peoples.... Their landlessness has deepened and expanded in direct proportion to the land accumulation of TNCs” and the land owning elite, (Rafael Mariano, Chairperson of the Peasant Movement of the Philippines.) And “according to rough estimates made by the Department of Agrarian reform, about 80 percent of the land belong to only 20 percent of the population.” (Ibon Primer Series, Land Reform in the Philippines, 1988).

Land reform, therefore, is still crucial to any genuine agrarian reform program. It also needs to be at the center stage of any economic program if it is genuinely aimed at alleviating poverty and increasing the standard of living of the people.

Poor rural women have been even further excluded and marginalised in their rights to land. Addressing the issue of women’s land rights is neither a separate nor secondary issue. Given the central role that women play in agricultural production, it is inextricably linked to the struggle for a more just, equitable and comprehensive land reform, agrarian reform and a pro-people centered economic reform program, which benefits the majority. Without women’s land rights guaranteed there can be no genuine agrarian/economic reform programs.

Is there a "statistical conspiracy"?

Marilyn Waring, author of a book on feminist economic analysis *If Women Counted*, argues that "the 'conceptual difficulties' and the 'problems of data collection' arose because *too many women did too much work*. The inadequacies were not those of the respondents, who could count the hours they worked, but those of the decision-makers and their system, which could not fathom or refused to believe the answers given."

It is easy to imagine how this gender-blind approach gets repeated in country after country. In the Philippines some 55 percent of women are involved in unpaid housework, according to the Management for Organizational Development and Empowerment (MODE). There is no indication that this is analysed and accounted for in the statistics presented by that country's National Statistics Office. Hence, one could assume that the 31 percent of the economically active female population in agriculture is in fact an under-reporting of the actual participation of women in agriculture-related activities.

Waring argues that the whole system of national accounts in the US, which is the basis for measuring production and growth, and the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), the method for measuring this throughout the world, makes women invisible, i.e. it is structurally biased against women.

The UNSNA decided to set up a 'production boundary' in order to decide which areas of human activity lie outside this boundary for the purpose of the national accounts. Until now essential household tasks are not to be included in this 'production boundary'. While a 1993 revision of the SNA recommended for the first time that all production of goods in households for their own consumption be included in the measurement of economic output—it still continues to exclude childcare, elderly care, cooking and cleaning.

Some estimates have already been made in some industrialised countries of the monetary value of a woman's unpaid housework. In Australia a 1990 survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics has estimated that women's unpaid work in the home is equivalent to 60 percent of the GDP. Perhaps these figures say something about the reluctance to change the System of National Accounts.

Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva points out that while there has been a small shift in the recent period with some national systems of accounting trying to internalise "women's work and nature's work, these attempts are being undermined by economic globalisation, thus eroding the capacity of national systems to define economic paradigms and economic priorities on the basis of environmental sustainability and gender justice."

These structural inadequacies have resulted in people's and nongovernment organisations (POs and NGOs) resorting to their own data collection, which tends to give a more accurate, woman-sensitive picture of the situation. Such data tend to look at the type of activity that people carry out in the household, instead of categorising the people around specific types of market-oriented production activities.

This gender analysis of the gender blindness of statistical methodology must be kept in mind when dealing with this and other research.

TABLE 11. Women-headed household, fertility rates and contraception, 1998.

	% of women- headed households
Philippines	11
Thailand	22
Vietnam	32
Laos	--

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, 1998

Wherever there is a male earner, women's earnings also form a major contribution to the household. Moreover, facts from the FAO Women and Population Division show that a larger percentage of women's earnings go to basic family maintenance compared to those of the men. Strong factual evidence show that it is the women who take on the main responsibility for the manifested care of the household and in this sense, are the genuine "heads" of households.

Despite this, land reform programs, such as that in the Philippines, still assign land to the "head" of the household, which (for cultural reasons) are invariably deemed to be men. This explains the small numbers of women who own land titles as beneficiaries of the agrarian reform programs (Tables 6 and 7).

A 1997 FAO report also points out that "women face the added difficulty of having their requests for land mediated through men. Even the use of small plots must be granted by a husband, inherited from a father or requested from male village elders. If women have their own plots, they are usually small, dispersed, remote and less fertile."

The notion of the "head of household" is historically, and the way it functions in most societies today, a patriarchal notion. Historically, it is derived from the development of the male patriarch as the head of the clan or the extended family. It is, and always has been, a gender-biased concept. Any land allocation program based on this structure will inevitably be biased against women. Therefore, a more equitable approach to land distribution needs to be based on the individual adults in a household, rather than the household as an undifferentiated unit.

In Vietnam, as a result of the revolution against colonial economic and political subjugation, a far-reaching land reform program was implemented. Under the 1993 Land Law there is no private ownership of land. "Land is owned by the entire people, not to be privatised nor bought or sold" (VIIIth National Congress Documents). However land can be leased from the state, known as 'land use' rights. This has led to a far more equal distribution of land in Vietnam, compared to the situation in other developing countries.

Vietnam's 1993 Land Law provides that land is to be allocated on the basis of an individual's age:

- Those of working age are allocated one full portion (16yrs-60yrs for men; 16yrs-55yrs for women);
- Those above working age and children from 13 to 15 are allocated half a portion;
- Children under 13 are allocated one third of a portion.

However, the law still leads to unequal land allocations and therefore land accumulation and wealth polarization in rural areas, according to the Scientific Research Center for Family and Women of the National University in Hanoi, which produced the paper, "Women, Men and Food-stuff Security." This is because it is based on the family unit, where families with more adult children get access to more land and therefore a higher income and standard of living. Single-parent families tend to get less land and due to cultural practices.

The cultural practices are cited as one of the main reasons for unequal access to land for women. For example, land accessibility of women becomes complicated when getting married or divorced, especially when marrying outsiders from their own home villages. Because a woman is supposed to move to her husband's village after marriage, she cannot bring her previously allocated portion of land to her new home nor continue to cultivate on that portion. This flows from the land non-ownership laws and village labour being cooperatively pooled.

In this case the woman's parents can negotiate to give her a sum equivalent to the value of that portion or the woman can sell the right to use or lease that portion so as to have some funds on hand when leaving for her husband's home. But this seldom happens in real life, according to the paper. "Married women usually come to their new home with bare hands," it says. "For women getting divorced, this situation becomes much more complicated, especially in the case of women having married outsiders." The women "only receive a sum of very small value compared with the assets they have previously contributed to the husband's home."

The paper also points to instances when women accede their 'land use' rights to the men. Because women themselves view the men as the household 'heads.' "Women are not concerned [whether] themselves or their husbands will have [their] names on the land use certificate. Women still want their husbands to represent their families."

This is also a problem noted in other studies where women accede the little rights they have to their husbands. In a number of cases this flows from women's perception of how society and their husbands in particular would want a 'good' wife to behave. It could be a 'trade-off' for achieving domestic 'harmony.'

These points are also borne out in a study on Lao PDR contained in an ADB paper. "In contrast to many developing countries, the poor of the Lao PDR are rarely landless. International studies show that access to land is a major factor contributing to sustaining relatively equitable income distribution, and is particularly important for women in subsistence and small-scale farming and business. To avoid loss to women of this invaluable asset will require careful monitoring of recent land decrees covering the distribution of forested and communal lands, registration of land for taxation and the proposed land titling process. Most ethnic Lao women (who make up 51 percent of the female population) customarily own land through inheritance. However, formal procedures such as signing documents and titling papers are customarily ceded to male relatives. Women have as yet little consciousness of the long-term legal consequences of

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not signing such papers. There is concern that the traditional practice of deferring to men in such public prerogatives could cause property disenfranchisement for women in the future. Similarly, with new procedures under the reforms allowing for the distribution of communal and forested lands, only the name of "head of household" (usually a male) is being placed on the documents. This will likely exacerbate gender inequalities in asset ownership.

"In addition, the land documentation and taxation process may unintentionally cause the poorest households to lose land. The division of communal property among villagers results in the assignment of taxes to individual households, increasing the tax burden on marginalised families. Common land used freely by women for foraging, growing upland crops, and grazing animals becomes subject to taxation, and to forfeiture where taxes are unpaid." (ADB "Women in Development" country briefing paper)

Cultural factors also apply when it comes to women's control over land that they may formally have rights to. Land control would cover a range of decisions made on the use of the land, such as: what crops to plant; what and how much inputs to use; whom to hire; how much to sell; and control over returns. Table 9 shows that the 'male heads' of households generally decide on these issues.

The Women and Population Division of the FAO describes security of tenure in this manner: "Land tenure refers to a set of rights which a person or an organisation holds in land. Security of tenure is not limited to private ownership but can exist in a variety of forms such as leases on public land or user rights to communal property. ... Tenure enables the holder to make management decisions on how land-based resources will be used for immediate household needs and long-term sustainable investment."

The issue of security of tenure is linked to questions on the economic, political and social security of women being guaranteed.

One of the most serious obstacles to increasing the productivity and income of rural women is their lack of security of tenure. The example of Vietnam, where women can lose their access to and control over land-use when marrying or getting divorced, points to the importance of security of tenure for women. As the FAO's 1997 report explains: "In areas with a high divorce or abandonment rate and where land remains with men in the case of separation, women are reluctant to invest time and resources to long-term land improvement." Hence women's security of tenure must also be guaranteed.

Land use and deforestation

The World Bank reported in 1998 that "Over the past few years growth in arable land area—which historically has been the main source of agricultural growth—fell to near zero on a global basis. A small increase in arable land in developing countries was offset by a decrease in those of industrial countries. Arable land area is still expanding in Africa and to some extent in Latin America, but in Asia the land frontier has been reached. With increasing demand for diversified crop and livestock products, the area under traditional food staples (mainly cereals) has begun to decline in Asia. The world is now almost entirely dependent on increased yields to expand agriculture." (Table 13)

TABLE 13. Trends in the decline of arable land (hectares), 1979-94.

	Arable Land		Agricultural land per worker	
	1979-81	1994-96	1979-81	1992-94
Philippines	.11	.08	1.0	0.9
Thailand	.35	.29	1.1	1.0
Vietnam	.11	.08	0.4	0.3
Lao PDR	.21	.19	1.1	1.0

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, 1998

About 10 to 15 percent of the rural population of developing countries lives in environmentally degraded or ecologically vulnerable areas. To the extent that rural women are in closer contact with their natural environment due to their predominant role in weeding, hoeing, carrying water and wood, they tend to be the first to suffer the impact of environmental degradation. Rural women could also be more vulnerable because of their already heavy workloads and worse health status.

TABLE 14. Increasing trends in land deforestation, 1995.

	Land Area -- 1000 (sq km) 1995	Rural population density -- people per (sq km) 1995	Forrest Area -- 1000s (sq km) 1995	Annual deforestation (sq km) 1990-95
Philippines	298	586	68	2624
Thailand	511	278	116	3294
Vietnam	325	1082	91	1352
Lao PDR	231	417	--	--

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, 1998

In many countries, large areas of forests have been set aside for commercial forestry or agricultural interests thus contributing to deforestation and the scarcity of fuelwood. With the degradation of the forests, due to their role in gathering fuelwood, women are more likely to be burdened by fuelwood scarcity than men are. (Table 14) The FAO says that nearly 80 percent of women in 18 Asian countries are affected by fuelwood scarcity. (Table 15)

TABLE 15. Fuelwood dependency and its impact on rural women, 1995.

	% of household energy from fuelwood	Population of Rural women aged 10-59 (000s)	Est. rural women affected by fuelwood scarcity (000s)	% affected
China (1980) -- D	80	29,1451	233,161	80
Indonesia -- D in Java, PD the rest	86	45,071	38,761	86
Myanmar -- PD	89	10,495	9,341	89
Philippines -- D, PD	81	11,324	9,172	81
Thailand -- D	77	15,057	11,594	77
Vietnam -- D and PD	78	17,537	15,433	88
Sri Lanka -- D	85	4,753	4,040	85
Pakistan -- D	72	24,003	17,282	72
India A, D in many states	84	204,928	172,140	84

Source: UN, *The World's Women, 1995*

Legend: D – deforested PD – partially deforested

Note: In Indonesia the regions studied were Java, North Sumatra, Sulawesi and Timor; Myanmar—the South; Philippines—Central, Luzon; Thailand—Central; Pakistan—Baluchistan, Punjab, Sind; India—Himalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharastra, northern plains, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu.

It takes longer for women in highly deforested areas to collect fuelwood. The median time spent by women in collecting fuelwood is half hour per day—and at least several times higher in highly deforested areas. In India, it can range from 0.2 to five hours per day. In Nepal from 1.1 hours in low deforestation areas to 2.6 hours in high deforestation areas. In Indonesia it can range from 0.1 to two hours per day. The quality of the wood collected can also make a difference. Softwood, for example, burns quickly, and more wood is required than slow burning hardwood for the same amount of cooking. The longer the time consumed in collection can affect other tasks or consume more of the total family labor with men and children helping out.

Studies also show that women's increasing time burden has links to fertility. As fuelwood and water collection become more and more time-consuming, parents might consider large numbers of children more necessary than in an environment with well-managed natural resources.

Deforestation also affects household food security in many other ways. Women's gathering activities are essential parts of the family diet. Much of what they gather is also processed or marketed, bringing in a supplementary cash income. During periods of famine and shortage women also use the forests to gather buffer foods which can be crucial to family survival.

Polluted indoor air

“Women in developing countries spend much of their time cooking with biomass—wood, straw or dung—in poorly ventilated areas and are thus exposed to high levels of indoor air pollution. One study in Nepal found that women cook for about five hours a day, with indoor particulate concentrations in rural areas as high as 20,000 micrograms per cubic meter (The WHO peak guidelines recommends that a concentration of 230 micrograms per cubic meter are not to be surpassed more than seven days of the year). As a result, acute respiratory infections and bronchitis are said to be very common in rural areas. Non-smoking women in India and Nepal exposed to biomass smoke have been found to have abnormally high levels of chronic respiratory diseases—with mortality rates comparable to those of heavy male smokers.” (UN, *The World's Women 1995*)

Water scarcity and irrigation

The demand for water is growing rapidly. The World Bank says that “Global per capita water supplies are a third lower than they were 25 years ago. Agriculture uses two-thirds of the world’s fresh water. (Table 16) Although irrigated agriculture has accounted for much of the dramatic increase in world food supplies over the past 20 years, constraints on water supplies will limit its capacity to do so in the future.”

Increased water pollution is even worsening problems of water scarcity. Women, as collectors, users and managers of water in the household, as well as farmers of irrigated and rainfed crops play a significant and in some areas of the world, even crucial role in water management. Women also have a considerable knowledge of water resources, including storage methods, access and reliability of water.

TABLE 16. Annual freshwater withdrawals, 1987.

	% for agriculture	% for industry	% for domestic
Philippines	61	21	18
Thailand	90	6	4
Vietnam	78	9	13
Lao PDR	82	10	8

Source: World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1995

The proportion of rural women affected by water scarcity is about 55 percent in Africa, 32 percent in Asia and 45 percent in Latin America. The median time for collection water in the dry season in the above regions is 1.6 hours per day. In wet seasons it is 0.6 hours per day. Water scarcity burdens women with added time spent on water collection. In rural areas, reasonable access implies that a family member need not spend a disproportionate part of the day fetching water.

TABLE 17. Access to safe drinking water, 1995.

	Rural population without access to safe drinking water (%)	Urban population without safe drinking water (%)	Number of urban women affected by lack of safe drinking water
Philippines	28	<10	--
Thailand	15	33	2064
Vietnam	67	53	3575
Lao PDR	75	53	211

Source: World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1995

Note: Safe drinking water includes treated surface water and untreated water from protected springs, bore holes and sanitary wells.

Irrigated agriculture programs have not taken into account the role of women in water resource management, and in many cases have been detrimental to women. For example irrigation systems generally favour large-scale monocrops and have been increasingly geared towards cash crops. This ignores smaller scale, more diversified food crop production, where women are generally found. Hence irrigation technology does not correspond to the hand irrigation technology needed by women in small-scale food crop production. Where such technology does exist, such as hand pumps with handles, these cannot be easily used or manipulated by women. Further, when they break down, women have not been given adequate training to repair such technologies. Irrigation design and implementation must take into account the needs of women and men.

More susceptible to pesticides?

A recent finding by the National Institute of Environmental Sciences (NIES) of the National Institute of Health in the United States has shown that women are more susceptible to specific poisoning from toxins found in pesticides and lead. "Toxins replace natural estrogen in cells... stimulating the production of various hormones or blocking such hormones...where they can influence cellular function over decades." Chemical compounds such as organochlorines (DDT), and dioxin, which are used in pesticides, were found to have an "estrogen-like activity" which may target the "bones, brain, cardiovascular system, liver, skin, uterus, and vagina." Other "[d]iseases related to estrogen include breast and uterine disease, including cancer, as well as endometriosis, fibroid tumors, premenstrual syndrome, reproductive dysfunctions such as infertility or lactation suppression." This explains the numerous health and fertility problems experienced by women contaminated with pesticide.

A 1997 report released by the Information Department of the Netherlands Development Assistance (NEDA) entitled, "Gender and Environment: A Delicate Balance Between Profit And Loss," has also shown that women agriculture workers have a higher risk of experiencing health and fertility problems because of their higher exposure to pesticides. The women more often, "weed and harvest the crops on heavily sprayed fields," the report says. Women "increasingly earn their money as 'sprayers,' which means they come into direct contact with the pesticides."

The Pesticide Action Network (PAN)-Asia and the Pacific has also noted the rampant use of pesticide all over the world especially in the South, where pesticide poisoning is prevalent. Factors cited for pesticide poisoning were the "availability of high toxic pesticides, lack of information and knowledge of [pesticide] hazards, aggressive marketing by industry, as well as poverty, illiteracy, and lack of health facilities in the rural areas, [all of which] ensure that pesticides are a major cause of poisoning."

Theodor Friedrich of the FAO Agricultural Engineering Branch, also admitted that the safe and efficient application of pesticides depend on the technical capacity, and the economic and cultural background of a country. Unless the importing country can afford safer equipment and conduct extensive training programs, farmers can avail of the benefits of pesticides unharmed. However, a study made by the FAO has shown that in India, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, farm workers were never trained adequately in safe and proper pesticide use, and in some states such as Pakistan and Vietnam, farm workers even fail to have access to basic equipment like an effective and safe spraying machine.

While the FAO and the United Nations Environment Program have tried to regulate and curb the use and spread of unsafe pesticides, participation from many countries continued to be slow. Last September 1998, only 57 countries signed the legally-binding Rotterdam Convention on Harmful Chemicals and Pesticides which aims to restrict the spread of hazardous and dangerous pesticides by allowing importing countries to ban or regulate their use by farmers in developing countries. Of the 57 signatories, only Kuwait, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Syria, Turkey and Yemen signed up from Asia. This is ironic, in light of the fact that Asia, with the exception of Japan, was identified to be a growing market for pesticides in the world.

Unless safer pesticides can be provided, more generations of women's health will be jeopardised by the harmful effects of pesticide. According to *Agrow: World Protection News*, the agrochemical industry will increase an average of 1.6 percent per year for five years. Until safer alternatives are promoted, women will be left as hapless victims of ignorance, under the mercy of training and equipment available commonly to those with economic access and technological knowledge.

Biodiversity vs. monoculture and alternative agricultural practices

The ecological arguments for agro-biodiversity are compelling. The FAO says that the last 100 years of agricultural production have resulted in:

- About 75 percent of plant genetic diversity lost since the 1900s as farmers worldwide discarded their multiple local varieties in favour of genetically-uniform varieties;
- 30 percent of livestock breeds at risk of extinction; six breeds lost each month;
- 75 percent of the world's food generated from just 12 plants and five animal species;
- Of the 4 percent of the 250,000-300,000 known edible plant species, only 150-200 are used by humans and only three—rice, maize and wheat—contribute nearly 60 percent of calories and proteins obtained by humans from plants.

In countries such as Thailand an alternative agriculture movement has emerged due to the following factors:

- lack of success in modern agriculture;
- small to moderate size of landholdings;
- poor soil;
- lack of capital;
- health problems resulting from the use of pesticides;
- destruction of ecological balance.

Rural women are responsible for the cultivation of diverse natural resources, such as crops, wild plants, tree products, and wild and domesticated animals, to fulfill daily household needs. Women are generally responsible for homegardens, which provide a wide variety of vegetables and other food products. These homegardens are also experimental plots where women try out and adapt diverse wild plants and indigenous species. This local knowledge is highly sophisticated. Women's specialised knowledge has important implications for the development of alternative forms of agricultural practices.

In Vietnam, the Garden-Fishpond-Husbandry (VAC) model of homegarden food production is being encouraged as part of a national integrated plan to improve the quality and variety of food and in response to ecological considerations. Income from practicing the VAC economy accounts for 50 percent to 70 percent of a farmer's household income. The value yielded from the VAC economy makes up one-third of the total value of agricultural production and is on the rise.

Ensuring food security does not only mean ensuring the provision of sufficient food such as rice and grains. Alternative forms of bio-diverse agriculture can also address another important aspect of food security—a balanced and healthy diet that takes into account a range of nutritional requirements.

Knowledge and Skills

Except for Laos, the literacy rate for women in three of the four countries surveyed is quite high.

Statistics from *Where Women Stand: An International Report on the State of Women in 140 Countries* produced in 1998 indicates that the current literacy rates in Laos is 41 percent,

and men 67 percent or a gap of 26 points. About 39 percent of women reach secondary education and those reaching higher institutions increases to 41 percent. Teacher training accounts for 40 percent of college training. A document put out by the Laotian Women's Union for the NGO Forum on Women in Beijing in 1995 identifies one of the obstacles to women's education as lack of equal opportunities. This is especially true in the rural areas and among ethnic communities. Boys have access to studying abroad or in temples whereas girls do not. Boys are given preference to education than girls. In areas where schools do exist, the curricula are not relevant to the conditions of rural residents. Women's workload was also mentioned as an obstacle that prevents women from taking time or interest in education.

On the other hand, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand boast of a high female literacy level. The Philippines is the highest with a 93 percent literacy rate for females, and 94 percent for males. At the secondary level 50 percent of the school population are females while in higher education, women make up 59 percent of the student body. Thailand's literacy rate for females is 91 percent, and for males, 96 percent. Vietnam scores a little lower with an 89 percent literacy rate for females, and 96 percent for males. However, in Vietnam the statistics change at the higher level of education. Half of the students at the higher level are females.

However, the statistics in themselves do not tell the full story that includes the quality of education, attainment of skills and accomplishments of females. The statistics do not reflect the literacy of women in urban as opposed to rural areas. In the Philippines for instance, a UNESCO study shows that for school age children of 15-19 years of age, the literacy gap of the urban and rural of the same age category is quite high. Urban women account for 2.9 percent of the total illiterate population whereas her rural counterpart accounted for 10.1 percent of illiterate females. The figures for rural males are also higher with a 12 percent rate. (*Women and Literacy*, by Marcela Ballara, Zed Books Ltd.)

In a recent study of rural women conducted by Sarilaya, a Philippine-based women's NGO, the researchers found that the overcrowding in schools is a major factor in deterring school age children from attending school in rural areas. Some classrooms contain 40 to 50 children per teacher. The mothers complained that the quality of education was also affected by the irregular attendance of teachers who are known to take on other income-securing activities to augment their meager salaries. Teachers are few and classes are canceled, as there are no teachers to step in for the absentee ones. In addition, the schools are so strapped for funds that for all projects including basic supplies such as electric fans, the children are asked to contribute money. Distance and no means of transportation were also cited as factors for children in rural areas to skip school altogether.

In Vietnam, the government along with the Vietnam Women's Union provides training courses for women. It has opened 40 training centers with another 133 sub-centers. These training courses include capital management and transfer of techniques and technology. The vocational training centers offer courses in industrialised garment making, arts and crafts, foreign languages, and information technology. Many rural women are aware of these courses but like their more illiterate sisters in Laos, their workload prevents them from taking on other time-consuming activities. Rural women's workloads appear to remain the

same among literate and illiterate women. Some feminists argue that the workload for literate women increases as they are then responsible for tutoring the children and carrying out writing and messengerial services for the less literate members of the family. Even in countries where educational opportunities are available to rural women, the household gets in the way.

The nature of education and skills development for rural women needs reviewing. As in the case of Vietnam where educational opportunities are available, the thrust of skills development is to satisfy the needs of economic globalisation that focuses on industrialisation, and the consumption of the middle-class, and /or exportation as in the case of crafts training.

In situations where rural food production skills development are available, it is much less available for women than it is for men. Rural women who are the growers and producers of local crops are likewise rarely seen as holders of knowledge. A survey on rice varieties was conducted in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. Government officials and male farmers generally mentioned eight to 10 varieties, but when the women were asked, they mentioned a hundred local varieties of rice. The ten high-yielding types were privy to production methods, whereas the others were not. (NEDA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, the Netherlands). This gap also illustrates the point that women's knowledge is often not solicited, documented, nor taken into consideration in the development plans of rural areas.

The knowledge and skills gap is multifaceted.

- Rural women are at a disadvantage in educational opportunities.
- The quality of education is poorer in rural areas.
- Women have little access to appropriate food production information.
- The knowledge and experience rural women possess is often devalued or ignored
- When women are educated, it is for the purpose of integrating them into the current models of globalisation and their use is relevant as it enhances such models.
(Development, Education and Women, Kamla Bhasin, talk given at the Fifth World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education, "Women, Literacy and Development: Challenges for the 21st Century," Cairo, September 15-23, 1994)
- Women's workload is such that it discourages their participation and interest in activities outside of the housework, child rearing, and farming.

Many activists including the United Nations argue that literacy for women means more empowerment and freeing up from the poverty cycle. While data backs up this claim and the universal right to education is a basic human right, it is important to note that literacy alone is not the ticket to women's empowerment, especially in the rural areas. The quality of education and other social services are important. Appropriate knowledge to enhance women's role as food producers should be shared alongside the men. Their full participation in the development of educational curricula based on the rural woman's need is imperative and the freeing up of her multiple workload will give her the freedom to participate, share and learn.

Credit/Subsidies

Cheap credit is an essential component in stabilising household incomes and food security as well as in improving agricultural production. Small rural farmers need short-term credit to purchase agricultural inputs such as seeds, develop food-processing techniques and pay hired labor. They need long-term credit to be able to purchase the appropriate technology or establish small-scale dairy, poultry or other such enterprises.

Women's access to credit is part of the problem of inadequate credit availability for small farmers. Women, however, face particular problems, resulting in them receiving only a minor share of total agricultural credit even in countries where they play a dominant role in food production. Some of the factors that limit women's access to credit are:

- Their inability to meet collateral requirements demanded by formal lending institutions such as banks, due to their lack of access to land, cattle and other tools of production.
- Complicated application procedures which alienate women.
- Extension programs mainly oriented to men.

This has led women to rely heavily on informal credit sources, such as family, friends and moneylenders. However, these sources tend to be unreliable. In the case of moneylenders, they often offer small amounts of capital at very high interest rates, thus having a disproportionate and negative influence on the marketing of agricultural products. In the Philippines, for instance, moneylenders also act as traders, and poor farmers are forced to sell their produce to these usurers at prices set by them.

Women's lack of access to cheap credit is becoming more acute as trends show women taking more responsibility for borrowing and budgeting in the home and for overall farm management especially in circumstances of male migration. (Table 18)

TABLE 18. Decision-making on credit availment, Philippines, 1996.

	Women	Men	Both
Who decides on from whom to avail credit	13.4%	32.3%	51.8%
Who decides on how much to borrow	13.6%	31.1%	53.1%
Who decides on budgeting	64.4%	14.1%	19.9%

Source: MODE, 1996. 87% of the respondents were male.

TABLE 19. Reasons behind choice of buyer, Philippines, 1996.

	% of responses (87% of respondents were males)
Offers higher price	34
Convenience/Accessibility	17.2
Closeness and marketing tie-up	13.2
With credit and marketing tie-up	18.0

Source: MODE, 1996

About 60 percent of the respondents said the traders set the price. (Table 19)

Women's World Banking (WWB) is a global network of more than 50 affiliate institutions providing credit, savings and business development services and has identified four types of lending institutions providing financial services to women.

1. Formal financial sector institutions which include government development banks, commercial banks and other financial institutions with special services for micro-entrepreneurs, including women;
2. Poverty lending institutions that lend only or primarily to low-income women;
3. Individual NGOs that lend to women micro-entrepreneurs;
4. Global and regional networks of institutions or programs that lend to women micro-entrepreneurs.

In the case of government development banks it would be useful to study the example of the Central Bank of Vietnam and its facilities—such as the Bank for the Poor.

One of the models recommended by the WWB in category 2 is the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. This is also a popular model studied extensively by NGOs and POs in the region and even recommended by institutions such as the World Bank. However, in the more recent period, the operations of the Grameen Bank have come under heavy criticism and the ensuing debate does raise valid points that pertain to the role and nature of credit in development strategies. One of the arguments raised is that the notion of alleviating poverty through credit is an extremely dubious and dangerous one. Some of the questions raised were:

- Is this the ideology of the free market asserting itself in the sphere of development, undermining notions of state subsidised social welfare?
- Is this another form of privatisation which undermines social welfare and subsidy-based development programs?
- In the rush for dubious short-term gains, are women being further enslaved through increased debt burdens?
- Ultimately, do these very financial institutions that are supposed to alleviate poverty become prey to the free-market capitalist ideology and become a part of the problem—rather than a part of the solution, for women?

Section III

Conclusions and recommendations

Women's land rights illustrate the breadth and depth of problems faced by women, particularly rural women. They range from the need to ensure that legal rights are guaranteed by the state, through comprehensive agrarian reform programs which benefit women, to the socio-cultural practices in society's smallest units, the community and the family, which mediate how these formal rights are ultimately translated for the benefit of women.

While it is very clear that women are disenfranchised from the big "macroeconomic" picture, but on the other hand, when it comes to women, "small" is not necessarily "beautiful" either. Going down to the micro-economic or community and family level is not an automatic panacea. There are real social obstacles operating within the family and community that continue to marginalise women. These obstacles flow from the socioeconomic nature of the small structures themselves, such as the family, which are linked to the bigger picture, and from the inescapable fact that individual men can and do benefit from women's subjugation.

Change in social and cultural attitudes has to come from within the community. It cannot be bureaucratically imposed from above or from outside. A strategy that intends to advance rural women's status needs to integrate the macro-economic-socio-political picture with the micro-economic-socio-political details. Also the question of rights, access and control need to operate at all levels.

The need to consider alternative agricultural practices is also imperative. The basis of this would be agricultural systems based on biodiversity instead of monoculture. Some forms that are being successfully practiced in rural communities in Thailand, such as integrated farming and natural agriculture, need to be studied. The VAC model in Vietnam also gives a good example of how to integrate small-scale biodiverse farming as part of a national plan.

Further, women's relationship with the environment is more complex than simply one of being the victims of environmental degradation or 'natural preservers' of the environment. While traditional roles have meant that women contribute to forestry and watershed management in many significant ways, the view that they are in some sense 'natural custodians' of the environment needs to be examined further. The depleting natural resources and the resulting intensification of the struggle for survival is so acute, that it leads to further exploitation of resources—by both men *and* women.

The problems of environmental degradation are so overwhelming that women badly need access to information, training, environmental institutions and a range of community-based organisations and other social rights in order to effectively deal with the problems they face. Training and education should involve areas such as agroforestry, organic farming, reforestation, processing of non-wood forest products for income generation, measures to reduce fuelwood consumption, water resource management, etc. Due to their traditional

role, some women may already possess some of these skills which they need the resources and encouragement to further develop and build on.

However, the fact remains that due to rural women's proximity to the environment in their day-to-day tasks, a gender analysis of areas such as forestry information, field methods and projects is essential to a social, people and environment-centered agricultural program.

While acknowledging that women's access to cheap credit is an important component of raising the status of women in agriculture there are several qualifications that also need to be made to ensure that women do not become enslaved by debt. The qualifications would include:

- Cheap credit. The concept here is essentially one of 'subsidised' credit, i.e. credit subsidized at below market rates which has as its primary purpose the welfare of the women. Making it for easy access without male authorisation in the decision-making. The understanding that credits on its own is an inadequate tool for women's poverty alleviation and could instead lead women to a more acute poverty 'trap'. Therefore credit has to be re-informed with government subsidies which benefit women in agricultural production and in transforming of their rural communities with the industries they need. The focus on women and rural poor-oriented subsidies is extremely important in a period where governments across the world are slashing these subsidies and other development programs in the name of 'competition.' In the Philippines, for example, government subsidies in agriculture have been slashed through the 1990s and stood at a paltry 4.5 percent of the national budget in 1995.
- Other state subsidised programs would include areas such as infrastructure (irrigation, road access, electricity, communication facilities); social welfare (health, education); pricing policies; access to agricultural inputs provided/subsidized by the state; land reform programs. Credit must not replace these programs and services.
- An integrated approach to the question of credit and state subsidies is needed, with credit playing a secondary role.
- The ultimate insurance that credit facilities and government programs will benefit the people and women in particular is women-focused community control of these programs and services.

There is a need for further study of this subject and development of areas, which this paper was unable to do.

Because of the severe time and funding restrictions allocated to this research paper, there were a number of areas, which were not studied, in-depth. This was particularly the case in relation to the alternative models of agriculture in Thailand and the movement that has emerged around this issue. This also applies to the program of land reform in Vietnam and some of the changes taking place on the land as a result of *Doi Moi*. The communal land-use practice in Laos and the impact of the New Economic Mechanism on this tradition also falls on this category.

The focus on the four countries places geographical limitations on the research. While the four countries draw out the general trends in the region, there are also important differences

within countries in the region that need to be evaluated. There are also other examples of alternative agricultural practices, not confined to the region.

A most important area for further study is the state of the grassroots organisations of women in the four countries and the region. This is also the most important question of strategy that challenges women, as the poor and marginalised, or as their allies—how to develop a powerful grassroots movement of women who take on these issues and assert themselves on the "powers that be." Involving women in the existing rural grassroots campaigns and encourage them to have a voice in the decision-making and leadership.

Another area of further study is to see how local NGOs and community-based organisations can concretely contribute to the empowerment of rural women by transforming traditional values that are obstacles to women.

Given the regional sweep of the project the purpose of this section is to suggest some priority *areas* for the consideration of NGOs and POs in the region. These priority areas have been based on studies and policy recommendations that NGOs and POs in the region, including those from the 1998 Asia Pacific People's Assembly, the World Food Day 1998 NGO forum in the Philippines; women's organisations such as Sarilaya (Philippines) and the Vietnam Women's Union; VACVINA in Vietnam; and the experiences of the Alternative Agriculture Network and movement in Thailand.

The study has also used the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam as a case study of the national adaptation of the Beijing Platform for Action as well as a comparative analysis of the FAO Program of Action for Women in Development 1996–2001 with the policy discussions of NGOs and POs in the region.

Priority Areas for Policy Development and Campaigns Which are Crucial to Addressing a Woman-Centered, Environmentally-Sustainable, Regional Food Security Program

1. Land Reform

A comprehensive land reform program must address the issue of land rights for women. Such a program must ensure: women's access to land; and women's participation in decision making. Such a program also needs to investigate alternative forms of land 'ownership,' with a particular focus on non-private property: cooperatives and communal property. At the same time, community groups working in the rural areas need to ensure that women who have land tenure hold on to it and do not give into family and community pressures.

2. Education and Training

A comprehensive region-wide education program with two major thrusts:

For women:

- Education and training of rural women of all ages with special focus on adult literacy and training to raise the educational level of rural women and girl children and to cater to specialised training programs which would benefit women food producers.
- Education and training programs should be free of charge.
- Childcare, food needs to be part of all teaching facilities including teaching aids and trained teachers.

For the general public:

- Gender sensitivity training at all levels of the government and related institutions;
- Gender sensitivity training incorporated to the curriculum of primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions;
- An overall gender awareness raising campaign in the media, in schools, in the communities, including NGOs and other community based organisations that work in the communities, in factories, in arts and culture, aimed at raising women's social status.

For large-scale gender training and educational opportunities, government resources are required for its implementation but low cost gender awareness campaigns can begin with local organizations in the communities.

3. Promotion of alternative forms of agriculture with the following key elements:

- Agricultural biodiversity instead of cash crop-oriented monocultures;
- Alternative forms of technology adapted to the needs of women and the environment;
- Research and development programs to develop scientific approaches to preserve and renew inherent natural resources; conserve and strengthen bio-

diversity in agriculture; help enrich local agricultural ecosystems; develop renewable energy resources, etc;

- Based on community monitoring, management and control.

4. The democratisation of the economy and politics at all levels of society's institutions—from the state to the family so that women and other marginalised people are fully involved and included.

It is also important to consider region-wide issue-based campaigns, based on concrete demands, which can be conducted. This strategy needs to involve an information network that insures that regional advocacy's are grounded in the issues that affect the local communities and that the information of the macro is transmitted to the grassroots organisations to further their understanding and involvement in macro issues.

The following proposals on regional campaigns from the Third Women's Conference Against APEC and the APPA statement on "Confronting Globalisation, Asserting Our Rights to Food" are of direct relevance to this study: Also the AoA Campaign of the South East Asian Food Security and Fair Trade Council.

Regional campaigns:

- For the removal of agricultural agreements and patents on life forms from GATT/WTO.
- To lobby for a change in direction of the Agreements on Agriculture (AoA) under the WTO.
- To remove all conditionalities imposed by the IMF/World bank.
- Against privatisation of health, education and basic amenities.
- Against transnational corporations. Against the monopoly of seed and agrochemical companies, especially Monsanto, Novartis and Cargill that threatens food security at the household.
- Monitoring of health and environmental hazards caused by pesticides and campaign against their production and use. Launching of the "No Pesticide Use Day" as an international campaign.
- Campaign against mining and building of dams that destroy indigenous communities and their lands. Campaign against large agribusiness corporations that ravage peasant farms.
- Strengthen the public health system and promote community-based health practices to ensure women's health and reproductive rights and ensure that children's health rights are met.
- Actively expose the fallacy of the WB-APEC strategy of mainstreaming women in the globalisation model.

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