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Industrial Policy and Decision-making  
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Kathmandu, Nepal, 29 March - 1 April 1993

BACKGROUND PAPER

Women's participation in industrial policy  
and management in selected countries of  
Asia and the Pacific\*

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## **Part I**

### **VARIABLES WHICH DETERMINE THE CURRENT PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT**

#### **A. Global Trends and Their Impact on Industrial Development in Asia and the Pacific**

Since 1990, the world has experienced a general slowdown in economic activity. As a consequence, unemployment shares were reaching or threatening to reach double digits by 1992 as cut-backs in production brought about by weak demand and declining profits caused mass redundancies. Many of the unskilled industrial workers who have been made redundant may have limited opportunities for re-employment even as the global economy recovers. Economic statistics released in the United States in January 1993, for example, already point to sharp increases in productivity without corresponding reduction in rates among the non-farm unemployed. To a large degree, these productivity gains have been made through the application of new technologies.

Technological progress is causing revolutionary changes in industry. Laser technology, for example, has myriad uses in the electronics industry; advances in biotechnology have great influences in the chemical and food processing industries; and information and computer technology are having a widespread impact on production methods. The use of computers reduces the importance of economies of scale in manufacturing and distribution, and makes it possible to produce a wide variety of goods cheaply at much smaller volumes, responding to the increasing demand for specialized and diversified products. The "factory of the future" will thus see economies of scope superseding economies of scale. (1)

As productivity advances will depend more and more on high-level automation, the developing world will lose its competitive edge as supplier of low-cost labour. It is foreseen that by the year 2000, there will be a global slackening of demand for the dexterity and the processing skills needed for assembly line operations. Instead, there will be greater demand for workers with multiple skills, with technical and engineering skills, and with administrative and managerial skills. In fact, it is projected insufficient supply of the above-mentioned skills in the labour market will become a constraint on industrial development.

Another recent phenomenon is the growing interdependence among large industrial conglomerates, as exemplified by the recent cooperative partnership between Daimler-Benz and Mitsubishi. The expanded global enterprise of the future may not have one mother company located in a particular country as is the case of the present-day multinational, but consist of cooperative ventures among existing multinationals based in various countries. This implies that corporate cultures and organizational policies will be more pluralistic and reflective of the local milieu rather than the global corporate culture of present-day multinationals.

With regard to labour supply, the industrialized economies are facing contradictory developments. On the one hand, recessionary conditions and technological change have created a large pool of unemployed, and systematic training/retraining for new skills are as yet largely inadequate. On the other, population growth rates have been low for some time, below replacement rates in some countries. This will create labour shortages in the years to come, even though the potential of the female labour force has so far not been used fully. Thus, it is foreseen that there will be economic need for importing skills; by the year 2000, one

could therefore essentially be speaking of a global workforce, especially in the skill areas mentioned above (2). This trend would be supported by cheaper and more efficient ways of travel.

There is however a countervailing trend: political opposition against imported labour. Developed countries can be expected to remain or become restrictive in their immigration policies. The contradicting economic pull and political push could lead to emerging opportunities for employment in various developing countries which possess the necessary skills and can therefore attract co-operative ventures between large companies formed on a (sub-)regional basis.

Other important developments may be anticipated. One is liberalized global trade once the Uruguay round of the GATT agreement is concluded. If this is (partly) blocked by protectionist tendencies in industrialized countries, the global economy could possibly witness the formation of very powerful regional trade blocs. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that the Pacific Rim has become one of the major regions of the global economy. Another development is the internationalization of capital markets, and thus, the increasing mobility of capital. In the 1990s capital will increasingly flow to nations which offer the most promising investment conditions, excluding - more than in the past - developing countries with inadequate infrastructure, unstable governments and an unfavourable legal framework for investment (3).

Many Asian countries are well-placed to take advantage of these developments. In spite of the current world economic slowdown, the Asian region has shown relatively strong growth. In 1991, it had an aggregate growth of 5.8%. (4) In 1992, with only a modest projected upturn in the world economy, it will once again lead world growth rates with an estimated aggregate GDP growth rate of 6.5%. (5) This compares favourably with, for instance, growth rates in Latin America (3.5%), Africa (3.4%), the Anglo-Saxon economies (1.1-2.8%), and a sharp contraction in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (6).

As in the past decade, particularly strong growth was evident in the newly industrializing economies (NIEs), with aggregate growth rates of 6.8% in 1990 and 7.3% in 1991 (7). Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, showing aggregate growth rates of 7.0% in 1990 and 6.0% in 1991 is likewise particularly well-poised for economic take-off. South Asia's growth rate, however, declined from 5.5% to 2.7% (8).

These high growth rates have largely been fuelled by industrial exports, especially in the NIEs. In Southeast (and South) Asia, buoyant domestic demand also played a role. However, if Asia is to maintain these growth rates, it must respond to the structural changes outlined above which are taking place in the developed industrial economies: advances in technology, their rapidly maturing industrial application and efficient transfer through increasing corporate partnerships, liberalized trade, mobility of capital, and mobility of labour.

Among the major assets of the Asian region are: its dynamism; its export orientation and consequent exposure to the needs of the international market; its labour force which is young, adaptable and mobile as compared to the ageing, more costly workforce in the industrialized economies; and the high value attached to formal education in most Asian countries, which is a requisite for the acquisition of skills demanded by future manufacturing.

Asia's negative characteristics are its highly skewed income distribution with opportunities for skills acquisition (beyond primary school level) usually concentrated in a relatively small privileged group, and - in most countries - relatively high population growth rates which continue to increase the number of labour force entrants experiencing difficulties in getting access to skills. The countries of the Pacific are in a somewhat different situation, Australia and New Zealand exhibiting the characteristics of developed market economies while the others, such as Papua New Guinea have characteristics which resemble those of Asia's low or middle income countries.

## **B. Role and Participation Levels of Women in Industry**

Women constitute approximately one-third of the global labour force with the highest rate of participation, approximately 42%, in developed countries, as opposed to approximately 32% in developing countries. In developing countries, women's participation in the labour force is highest in Sub-Saharan Africa at approximately 40% and lowest in the Arab region with approximately 13%. In Asia, it currently averages 35%. In Australia, women now constitute over 42 per cent of the wage-labour force (9).

Current research undertaken by UNIDO shows that high rates of women's participation in the economy are often associated with the early stages of development when they play crucial role in agriculture and agro-based micro-enterprises. As industrialization and urbanization develop, women move from agriculture into traditional services and the manufacturing sector; at the next stage, now witnessed in the more advanced economies, they increasingly move into the modern services sector.

Currently, 86% of all economically active women in the developed countries are engaged in non-agricultural activities; in the developing economies the figure is approximately 50%. Half of all economically active women in developing countries are self-employed, operating micro and small businesses in the informal sector, or being engaged as unpaid family workers. The services sector employed 43% of working women in developing countries; in developed countries the figure was 65%; and women tend to be overrepresented in this sector.

The share of women in the manufacturing labour force is approximately 30% in both developed and developing countries. Asia has the highest share of women: 35%, and among Asian countries, the industrialized East Asian countries, the NIEs and Thailand show the highest shares, with shares of 40 per cent and over in 1990. These women are mostly production-line workers in the garment and textile industries, but also in electronics and other industries turning out export-oriented consumer products. However, the manufacturing sector only accounts for 13% of all economically active women, as compared to 48% in services and almost 35% in agriculture.

Regardless of which sector they are in, employed women are segregated horizontally in terms of occupation, and vertically in terms of rank or position level. They are overwhelmingly found in the lower end of the job spectrum, concentrated in low-skill and low-wage jobs. In manufacturing industries, they are found in factories with light, assembly-type operations. In service companies, they are found in clerical and secretarial positions. Often, women are paid less than men for equal work.

Recent statistics from the world's leading economies show that the share of the service sector is increasing. The USA, for instance, had 76% of its labour force in the service sector in 1992 (up from 50% in 1950), which accounted for 72% of the

country's GDP. Services are also becoming the fastest-growing part of international trade, accounting for 20% of the total world trade now (10). It is to be expected in the medium-to-long term that this trend towards services will also make itself felt in the developing countries in Asia; in fact, the trend is already noticeable in some of the NIEs, like Singapore. This is closely intertwined with the increasing role played by information-intensive technologies, which - as indicated above - is also affecting manufacturing.

These developments will have an impact on the current participation rates and patterns of Asian women in industry. Women with higher educational levels in the NIEs will increasingly focus their attention on career prospects in the services sector. The prospects for advancement in manufacturing industries which offer new employment opportunities are doubtful because women usually do not have the skills required by the latest "industrial revolution". And in all Asian countries low-skilled women working on the assembly line are facing the risk of redundancy.

To prevent the marginalization of the majority of women in this process, women need to acquire skills through better formal education. Unfortunately, women still lag behind men in most Asian countries, in terms of literacy and access to formal education. Participation levels of boys and girls attending primary schools are no longer very different, with a few exceptions: in Nepal and Pakistan, for example, boys are almost twice as likely to complete primary education (11). But the gap widens considerably as they progress to secondary levels, until a differential of 64% is reached by the time they enroll at the tertiary level, although the more developed countries in the region do quite well in this respect. Female participation rates in technical education tend to be very low in all Asian developing countries, and even in the industrialized countries in the Asia and Pacific region technically educated women are definitely a minority: in Australia, for example, they only constituted 12% of the tertiary-level engineering students in 1992 (12).

The reason behind differences in literacy rates and access to formal education - as well as behind different wage levels and career prospects - is the socio-economic status ascribed to women, and the fact that even in the industrialized Asian countries they are not expected to be breadwinners but homemakers and child-minders. With regard to the latter: a factor which impedes the participation of women in industry in many Asian countries is their high fertility rate. A fertility rate of 4 or more is found in many countries, for example Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea. Low rates, approaching those in the developed market economies, are mainly found in the NICs, although countries like China, Thailand and Sri Lanka have made much progress in this respect.

While the position of women differs considerably among Asian countries, the overall picture is one of progress. Obstacles notwithstanding, women have made some visible gains during the past years - from increasing access to education to increasing participation in the industrial labour force. Between 1960-1980, as data from the International Labour Organisation show a substantial increase in the participation of women in industry vis-à-vis that of men. Whereas the male industrial labour force grew by 2.6% each year, the female industrial labour force grew at an above-average rate of 3.3% per year (13). It is of essential importance not only to safeguard the gains made during the past decades, but also to further strengthen - especially in a qualitative sense - the position of women in Asian manufacturing.

### **C. Role and Participation Levels of Women in Management**

While women's participation in the global labour force is high and continues to grow, however, their participation in managerial positions is significantly lower and growing at a much slower pace, with almost no perceptible change in the senior management ranks during the past 10 years.

It is currently estimated that women's share in administrative and managerial positions globally is approximately 16.5%. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) further estimates that as of 1987, for the industrialized Western countries, they comprise approximately 24% of the management sector (14). Some of the more socially advanced countries have higher participation rates, including the United States where women comprise almost 40% of all management positions and Canada where they form approximately 34% (15). The Nordic countries form another region where women are relatively well-represented in management positions.

The share of women in management positions in Asia is estimated at 13% of all management ranks, which is well below the rates for Western countries (24%) and Latin America (22%), but higher than in Africa (16). Within Asia and the Pacific, Southeast Asia has perhaps the highest participation rate of women in management, especially in countries such as the Philippines with 25% (1987); Thailand with 15.4% (1980); and Singapore with 21.9% (1987) (17). This reflects the relatively high status enjoyed by women in many countries in the region, and - in such countries as the Philippines and Thailand - their relatively equal access to educational opportunities.

On the other hand, Malaysia with 8.3% (1980) and Indonesia with 6.6% (1985), have a relatively low representation of women in management, partly because of the Muslim traditions in these countries. A low participation level in management is also found in Japan, with 8% (1987), although the country has a high proportion of women in the labour force.

Who are these women managers? Southeast Asian female professional managers (i.e. managers in wage employment), and especially managers employed by private corporations, were the subject of a 1987 survey sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The study defined professional managers as organizational employees who exercise latitude in decision-making as to the allocation and use of organizational resources, including physical, financial, and human resources. Most of the women corporate managers were relatively young (between 30-40 years old), well-educated, urban, and belonged to the middle or upper classes (18).

An overwhelming number of professional women managers are found in the service sector. Managers in non-service organisations are mainly found in management positions in "support" departments, such as public relations, human resource development, and corporate planning.

Further, professional women managers are concentrated in first level management where career opportunities are limited; they tend not to rise beyond the middle levels of management. (The United States, with probably the highest percentage of women in senior management, still only has 11% women represented in the senior ranks (19) and a mere 3% in top management (20)). In short, the position professional women managers - performing staff/support functions in large



organisations and occupying the low-to-middle tiers in the management ranks - reflects the overall position of women in wage employment.

Female entrepreneurs in the modern sector as a group show somewhat different characteristics: they do not necessarily have as high a level of formal education as professional managers, nor are they so heavily concentrated in urban areas. Their involvement in business may more often be based on necessity (providing for a family) than on choice. While the obstacles to success in business as an independent entrepreneur are many (women, for example, often have greater difficulties in securing finance), many women feel that this gives them more opportunities, and managers who have no further career prospects often leave corporate life to establish their own businesses. The latter trend can be observed both in Asian LDCs and in the most advanced countries in the Asian and Pacific Region. The most successful female managers are frequently entrepreneurs as well.

If an enterprise run by a woman entrepreneur shows promise, her husband - who may have had a salaried position - may decide to enter the business. In the many countries where the male is still given titular dominance, the husband then becomes the chief executive officer, and the wife treasurer. She may remain in charge of day-to-day operations, but external negotiations and membership of the Chamber of Commerce will be the domain of the husband, who thus gains more visibility (21).

During the next decade, the decreasing birth rates, the increasing demand for highly qualified human resources and the continued rise of the services sector in Western industrialized countries, will offer good opportunities for women in these countries aspiring to managerial positions. Some Asian societies may reflect Western trends towards the growing integration of women into managerial positions. These countries include the East Asian economies with a high economic growth rate and a declining growth of the labour force, as well as Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and possibly the Philippines once the economy of the latter country starts expanding again.

Most of these countries have liberal views on the position of women and their female population enjoys relatively good access to higher education and skills development. South Asia remains hampered by traditional cultural values regarding the role of women in leadership positions: even if some women reach the highest levels of political life, as in India and Bangladesh, this does not mean that their broad participation in high-level decision making in the economy has become reality.

In summary, Asia's high economic growth rates which are projected to continue well into the 1990s and beyond, as well as its other competitive strengths as mentioned above, should exert sufficient demand pull to create opportunities for men and women alike. This positive trend is likely to be strongest in East and Southeast Asia, and should have spread effects to Australia and New Zealand. However, with regard to women a number of factors exist which prevent them from taking full advantage from the increasing demand for people who can exercise leadership in the economy: these include the lack of (enforceable) legislation on equal employment and educational opportunities, and the great income inequalities in most of developing Asia which provides only a relatively thin segment of the population with adequate access to higher-level education, a situation which has the strongest impact on lower-income women. Moreover, social attitudes and corporate culture tend to prevent women from reaching high-level positions in all countries in the region - including Australia and New Zealand.

## **Part II OBSTACLES TO AND STIMULI FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT**

### **A. Obstacles to Women's Access to Management Positions**

There are a number of major societal obstacles, as well as obstacles within enterprises or within the women themselves, which impede women's entry into managerial positions in Asia. The present section will discuss the most important of these:

#### **1. Corporate Culture**

Most organizations were founded and developed, and are managed by men. Corporate culture therefore tends to express their values, and even in the most advanced countries in the region, like Australia, senior managers have been found reluctant to accept the presence of women at their level. Personal contacts among businessmen also tend to play a key role in recruitment at the higher levels, and therefore women, who are as yet seldom part of such "old boy" networks, tend not to be candidates for such positions (22). An Indian source suggests that certain characteristics which women have traditionally exhibited - tenacity, intuitive handling of people, co-operativeness - may actually give them an edge over males in running an enterprise (23); this may be perceived as a threat by male managers. Finally, some countries, like the Republic of Korea, still discourage women from continuing to hold a job after marriage.

Inertia is difficult to overcome, especially when systems are based on outdated habits of thinking and behaving. Many of today's government and business leaders were raised in an era when the roles of men and women were clear and unambiguous. The blurring of gender roles is creating confusion. Many of Asia's educated younger women no longer feel bound by traditional values and patterns of behaviour, but it may be assumed that it will take a generation before more equitable gender roles will be accepted by most decision makers in business.

Equitable opportunity legislation, which is being adopted by an increasing number of countries in the region, can only provide the legal basis for such changes, even in the most developed countries: "no parliament can overcome deep ingrained social attitudes by merely passing legislation...it is the ongoing commitment to a goal which will over time achieve real change" (24). Meanwhile, the dissonance between structures and normative patterns, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the changed attitudes and expectations of many of the educated younger women - as well as an increasing number of younger men - can be a highly frustrating experience and results in high human costs.

#### **2. Negative Perceptions of Industrial Decision Makers**

An obstacle related to that of male-dominated corporate culture is that of the negative perceptions of industrial decision makers. Many top executives interviewed for a 1990 study on Gender Representation in Philippine Management and Organisational Performance sponsored by the Canada-ASEAN Centre, claimed that women and men by virtue of their gender possess certain favourable as well as unfavourable traits. While women were perceived to have favourable traits (such as reliability) which were useful in selected positions of responsibility, their perceived unfavourable traits were generally considered to outweigh them in the sense that they

precluded them from being assigned to key positions of responsibility, including top management.

These stereotyped notions of feminine characteristics were given by respondents across industries. The most frequently cited unfavourable traits are as follows: women lack vision (essential for top managers) because of lack of exposure to the world of business; women lose their strict focus on work once they get married; they have problems being assertive but can be petty, jealous and catty; they are less able to make hard decisions; and because they are emotional, are poor at crisis management. Men, on the other hand, were perceived to be more decisive and objective, and generally fairer (25).

Many Asian societies also still hold the notion of women as frail beings who have to be shielded from rough working conditions. While this perception has not stopped women in for example the textile and garment industries from being employed in the most appalling conditions, it often automatically precludes women's access to more demanding, more visible, and more competitive assignments - assignments which are also usually needed to make promotion.

Examples of such assignments are field sales operations and production management. This bias is allegedly justifiable on the grounds that sales involves frequent travel, at times to "risky" destinations or under primitive circumstances. On the production floor, women often cannot be legally assigned to the night shift (this is one example of basically sound labour legislation, which unfortunately works against women in some Asian countries). Even in the service sector, many corporate officials are reluctant to ask women to work late night hours because women themselves may feel the need to be with their families, and/or because it is felt it would be unsafe for them to return home alone at night.

### 3. Lack of Opportunities for Education and Skills Development

One of the requisites for managerial positions is a relatively high educational attainment. It has been pointed out that women in Asia and the Pacific still lag behind men in educational attainment in varying degrees because of cultural preferences giving priority to boys over girls when educational opportunities are limited. Among low-income groups in the less developed countries in the region, money spent on the education of girls is often considered "wasteful". However, whenever women have relative equality in access to education, they have generally performed better at school than men.

On the other hand, women who enter tertiary education often register for courses which are not directly valued by industry, such as the arts and humanities. Relatively few women are as yet enrolled in the sciences and in engineering, although there is a gradual shift in women's preferences and opportunities. In the Republic of Korea, for example, a special engineering college for women has been opened, while at the same time access of women to other types of professional training is being improved (26). The growing importance of non-technical (purely managerial, marketing, administrative, etc.) skills in manufacturing would also be in favour of women: although they represent a minority in business studies as well, their participation rates in this field are often considerably higher than in sciences.

On the part of learning institutions, there is sometimes a reluctance to encourage female students in a previously "masculine" profession, e.g. accountancy, as it is perceived that women practitioners would lower the prestige of the occupation. Some schools have even imposed informal quotas for women entrants.

At the enterprise level, employers are sometimes reluctant to send women to expensive management training programmes in the belief that training investments in men have a more secure pay-off, as women may decide (or are encouraged) to leave employment after marriage. In Singapore, married women - especially those with children - are likely not to be given training opportunities which would enhance their career prospects (27). The reluctance of senior management to let women acquire direct practical experience in crucial managerial or technical functions has already been referred to.

#### 4. Lack of (Enforceable) Legislation on Equal Employment Opportunities

Most Asian countries now have equal rights for men and women written into their constitution, but the principle has often not been operationalized into laws which are actually enforced. There are exceptions. A limited job reservation scheme, for example, is being implemented in the Bangladesh civil service (28). While at present this scheme has the disadvantage that - owing to educational shortcomings - "the right woman for the right job" is not always employed, it opens up career prospects for women, and should facilitate access to higher-level positions for future generations of women with the appropriate background.

The formulation of the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) is a positive indication of another government's commitment to women's development. The PDPW aims at among others equal opportunities in employment and business, better training and education, equal access to credit and diversification of female employment. The Department of Labor and Employment has been given a key role in the implementation of PDPW - without a proper institutional framework, no law or programme can be effective in improving the position of women (29).

In the Pacific, developed countries such as New Zealand have Employment Contracts and Equal Pay acts which are being enforced. In a developing country like Papua New Guinea the government has formulated a National Women's Policy, but is obliged at the same time to take account of traditional law and customs which relegate women to a subordinate position, and progress is likely to be relatively slow. Other less-developed countries in the region, and women from minorities like the Maori in New Zealand (30) are likely to face this problem as well.

Perhaps one reason why equal employment opportunities have in most cases not yet received sufficient attention is that many developing Asian countries feel that macro-economic and political issues have a higher priority and must be addressed first. Equal employment measures receive a lower priority because governments are male-dominated without exception.

One additional consequence of the absence of enforceable legislation is that sexual harassment goes virtually unpunished in most countries in the region, and is absent in none. Many career women feel that it is simply part of the unwritten rules of employment which, like most rules, must be accepted in order to protect one's career.

#### 5. Societal Pressures on Women to be Homemakers

In many Asian countries, success in a career often comes at a high price. Some traditional values, such as the pressure for women to marry up in the social ladder, remain as strong today as they were a generation ago. In a country like Bangladesh, a working woman is moreover expected to turn over her earnings to her husband (31), and this social norm is not unheard of elsewhere. Such pressures imply that

many women aspiring a career run an even higher risk of remaining unmarried than if the causes were limited to the pressures of work alone, simply because as they move up the career ladder, the number of eligible men dwindle. This also means that married women executives may run the risk of losing their husbands if the realization of their career ambition offers a distinct possibility of their surpassing their husband's accomplishments.

Again, in the 1987 survey of Southeast Asian women managers referred to before, 78% of the respondents claimed that they had to work harder than their male colleagues simply to keep pace with their colleagues' advancement. The reasons are numerous, ranging from being in a minority and not having easy access to necessary information, to occupying positions where responsibilities are numerous but authority limited. Not surprisingly, many reported working long hours (32).

As homemakers, women managers carry a double responsibility. Many respondents to the survey complained that their relationships with their husband and children suffered as a result of their work commitments. But Southeast Asian women are not unique in this respect: the "double burden" is carried by women in all countries in the region, including industrialized countries like Australia and New Zealand. Even in the latter, sharing of responsibilities with a partner and/or satisfactory child care facilities are not necessarily common. The double burden also affects a woman's opportunities for follow-up training which may be essential for her career. In the end, women's success in balancing their multiple roles depends on the establishment of a clear set of priorities and on their skills in organizing the deployment of their time and energy.

#### 6. Women's Lack of Confidence

A frequently mentioned key factor which prevents women from aspiring to higher management positions is their lack of self confidence. Lacking role models and mentors to draw guidance from, lacking previous experience of success and frequently lacking managerial skills acquired through formal training or direct apprenticeship, women themselves may shirk from accepting greater responsibilities. The problem is less serious in countries where women have traditionally been in a relatively strong social position, such as Thailand, and in the industrialized countries in the region, where women have been working in non-traditional occupations for several decades; but it is found in all countries.

The problem has been addressed by numerous programmes, such as assertiveness training, career planning, and negotiation skills training, but these are often too expensive for women and most enterprises are reluctant to fund their participation on the grounds that they are perceived to be self-development courses whose benefits accrue to the participants rather than the company. Helping to increase women's self-confidence therefore remains an important task for federations of female professionals, which are active in all countries in the region.

#### **B. Factors Stimulating Women's Access to Management Positions**

##### 1. Increasing Awareness of the Changing Role of Women

The militant feminism of the 1960s made much of the world aware of the changing role of women. While this was largely a phenomenon of the industrialized countries, women all over the world have been confronted since then with independent professional women through the global media, and this has had a considerable impact.

This change in consciousness has been complemented by economic and political liberalization in many countries in the region, offering new opportunities for women. National governments have established commissions, offices, or even ministries with the aim of integrating women into the economic mainstream of the country. International development organizations have in many instances introduced a women's component in aid programmes and thus provided a catalyst to the process. Most of these programs are targeted at women in agriculture, or in micro-enterprises in the informal sector, or those occupying the lowest rung of the employment ladder in the formal sector. But the awareness of the need for more participation of women in decision-making has also grown.

One of the major problems of current women managers, especially in the developing countries of the region, is the lack of role models. While the fact that women have in recent times risen to positions as Prime Ministers or Presidents in several Asian countries has had a positive impact on women's self confidence, there are as yet few women in senior positions in business, and many of these women are seen to have paid a heavy price for career success, including perceived failures in their personal lives.

It may however be assumed that the current trend towards women's advancement will continue, in spite of conservative backlash in some countries. The number of potential senior managers is therefore likely to expand considerably as younger women currently in middle level positions advance in their careers, creating more opportunities for both role modelling and mentoring to younger women in the longer run.

## 2. Growing Demand for Female Managers

The demand for women with a higher-level education or skills to fill management positions is also likely to grow because of the region's prospects for healthy economic growth in the 1990s. Such countries as Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and the Republic of Korea already have labour shortages encouraging migration of labour within the Asian region. This projected demand pull will create new opportunities for men and women alike.

In the middle and high-income economies in the region, the expansion of the service sector, where women are already well-represented, and of the services component in manufacturing, is also of great relevance. These activities require administrative and managerial skills rather than technical skills in which women are still weak. The increasing importance of these activities will help to create a "critical mass" of women in the lower and middle management ranks, enhancing the opportunities for women to reach senior managerial positions. Further, women managers tend to be more supportive of other women when there is a significant number of them in the organisation.

## 3. Affluent Career Women as Potential Change Agents

In their present stage of development, most developing countries in the region continue to have a small middle class. The income divide remains wide, wider even than the gender divide. The few women who have access to first-class education and training are usually from high-income families. Those who choose to have careers work in senior positions in their family's firms or own their well-capitalized businesses. They may also decide to enter corporate life for various reasons, but because of their family's contacts and their own training, they are given high entry positions.

While their numbers are few, these women have an important potential as agents for change. As such, they have unfortunately largely been ignored by change strategists. These affluent career women are likely to be accepted by the male decision-making establishment, being often part of the same social network. They may also feel less threatened than their male colleagues by the increasing number of women aiming at a career in business. They are thus well-placed to advance the cause of women.

#### 4. Changing Attitudes of Decision Makers

A number of perceived female characteristics is seen in an increasingly positive light by entrepreneurs in many countries in the region. According to the 1990 Canada-ASEAN Centre study referred to under A.2, Asian women are generally more diligent, more disciplined, and more organized, patient, and meticulous than men; they are considered more trustworthy and morally upright, more nurturing, and better listeners; better at controlling funds (because of their experience with budgeting); and more intuitive, creative and resilient than men. The Indian study mentioned in A.1 lists roughly the same positive characteristics, and entrepreneurs in Papua New Guinea ascribe such characteristics as reliability, etc. more often to women than to men (33).

These characteristics have been and are often used to relegate women to poorly paid and otherwise unattractive jobs. But where women combine these perceived characteristics with rising educational and skill levels, an increasing number of entrepreneurs are accepting women in positions which utilize these perceived strengths in a better way. These include positions in finance, quality control, market research, public relations, and human resource development. It has already been pointed out that these are usually not strategically important posts, but they are essential for business, and can become a starting point for further advancement if the remaining obstacles to women's careers are removed.

#### 5. Presence of Support Systems

Women managers in the developing countries in the region usually have few problems finding domestic helpers and child minders, as opposed to those in the industrialized countries. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the 1987 survey of Southeast Asian women managers indicated that 68% allotted one hour or less per day to housework (34). The extended family system also helps to redistribute some of the responsibilities for child rearing, freeing time for women to pursue career goals. No less than 88% of the women in the 1987 survey indicated that they lived with a member of their extended family.(35)

It is to be expected that this figure will decrease substantially in the near future as the present trend towards single-family households continue. The systems of support now common may also impede the women who have taken over the domestic responsibilities from pursuing their own careers. Child-care facilities, or demands for part-time work and flexible hours, while not high on the priority list of women in most countries yet, are thus likely to become more important, as they are for women in the industrialized countries. The more advanced countries in the region - Australia and New Zealand, but also a NIC like the Republic of Korea - have institutionalized the provision of child-care facilities, but their capacity is not sufficient. Part-time is also becoming increasingly common in such countries. It should however be noticed that, while offering greater flexibility and more job opportunities, part-time work has a negative influence on career prospects.

### **Part III**

## **STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE OBSTACLES AND ENHANCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT**

### **A. Strategies Supporting Professional Women Managers**

A strategy to improve the skills and capabilities of women who wish to embark on a management career would have the following elements: ensuring that women have an enforceable right to equal employment; removing biases against women in enterprises; encouraging women who are already in management positions to support other women; and strengthening women's managerial skills.

#### **1. Implementable Legislation on Equal Employment Opportunities**

Governments should study the current ideas on equal employment opportunities and the measures which have been taken in this respect in the industrialized countries. While many of the developing countries may not be prepared to adopt affirmative action programmes such as are being initiated by the Australian government, or may even think them counterproductive (with a view to possible backlash), laws can be adopted which equally safeguard men's and women's rights in the workplace would protect women from outright discriminatory practices, including sexual harassment at work. Equal access to education should also be enforced.

A number of developing countries in the region are implementing such legislation or measures of a similar kind. Apart from initiating the PDPW (see above) the Philippines has also passed laws on equal employment conditions, the expansion of employment opportunities for women and welfare/maternity benefits (36). Korea's 1989 equal employment legislation among others includes articles on equal pay and hiring practices. In Indonesia, special programmes to enhance the role and status of female workers as well as integrated programmes for male and female workers were part of the latest Five Year Plan (37).

Women's professional associations can play an important role in the formulation of relevant laws and programmes. This is common enough in the industrialized economies, but an LDC like Bangladesh also offers a good example of active involvement on the part of women (38). Being part of such professional networks is therefore of the greatest importance for women.

Agencies which can monitor the implementation of equal opportunity laws are essential. The available literature contains little information on these. In Papua New Guinea, it is evidently easy for employers to circumvent existing legislation. The role of the Department of Labor and Employment in the Philippines has already been mentioned; in New Zealand, Maori women are represented in key positions in relevant agencies to ensure equal treatment of indigenous women (39).

#### **2. Sensitization Programmes for Private Sector Executives**

Legislation based on arguments of social equity, of democratisation of benefits from economic productivity, etc., will not necessarily convince the business community. Periods of rapid economic take-off have usually been effected through the concentration of power over resources in the hands of a few. The world of business operates on the principle of profitability. The integration of women into management must be shown to result in enhanced productivity for the industrial enterprise.



Quantitative studies as well as informed observation have shown that the integration of women at the decision-making level of firms does lead to better management, especially in the medium to long term. A 1991 study of Malaysian firms sponsored by the Canada-ASEAN Centre, for instance, showed that large companies which had a better gender balance in their management team were more profitable and had a more motivated staff (40).

Especially in countries with labour shortages - in this case, the more developed countries in the region - it makes business sense to train and integrate women in the workforce. Apart from this it also makes business sense to develop a management team which reflects the characteristics of the organization's overall staff as well as the characteristics of its client base in order to approximate client needs. Women are usually well represented in both these groups. Finally, it makes good management sense to encourage diversity of opinions and ways of thinking within management. Such openness will make a firm more creative and innovative, strengthening its competitiveness.

Forward-looking companies should look at the career paths of women. Without the challenge of promotion to higher levels, they are likely to lose interest in their jobs, or to leave the firm. This represents a great loss in terms of creative inputs, skills and experience. The increasing presence of women among the junior ranks makes this a potential management problem in the near future unless women are given opportunities to be upwardly mobile. Women who leave a firm in the absence of such opportunities do not only represent a loss of skills; a large turn-over among female staff is also costly. A new employee has to be recruited and trained, and productivity will initially be lower, as recruits often need several months to become fully productive.

Sensitization programmes covering these issues should also deal with management prejudices as they affect the areas of recruitment and placement. As women's capabilities tend to be underestimated, they tend to be assigned to staff functions while men are assigned to line positions and to higher management. This then sets the pattern for the future underutilization of women's skills and creativity.

### 3. Mentoring Younger Women

A critical factor in promotion to higher management levels is the help of senior executives acting as mentors. They provide career guidance and higher-level contacts. The presence of mentors, especially at the later stages of women's careers, is even more important for women than it is for men, as women often do not have similar access to information or contacts. Mentors could be especially important for young women with a lower socio-economic background, who are less likely to have the experience and contacts required to make a career. There is thus also an equity argument in favour of mentoring.

However, since most senior managers are men, there is the risk that the relationship with the mentor will develop sexual overtones. Even if this is not the case, the mere suspicion among a woman's colleagues that she could be having a liaison with her mentor could be damaging to a woman's long-term career development.

This underlines the crucial role of women in senior management positions in promoting younger women. Yet, with the dual burden of work and home, many are reluctant to take on this task. Effort should be made to persuade women executives of the benefits in mentorship, both for themselves as for their protégés. Some

progressive companies in industrialized countries have encouraged their women executives to undertake mentorship functions, making it part of their human resource development responsibilities.

#### 4. Seminars and Workshops

In all countries in the region, governments, women's professional organizations and donor agencies organize training programmes which address women's alleged weaknesses. In some countries, like Papua New Guinea, such programmes are still in their initial stages, and therefore to an extent also serve as evaluations of the overall situation of female employees (41). In the more developed countries, it is possible to target (future) female managers as a group, and programmes include workshops on career planning which assess individual strengths and weaknesses and set career objectives; career management workshops which include formulation of career strategies such as niching and mentoring; and skills development seminars offering assertiveness training, confidence building, training in negotiation skills, etc.

Such programmes should not discourage women by their high costs. While they can be seen as key elements in human resource development, which should encourage governments and donor agencies to increase their financial support, there is often scope for cost-saving through the use of pre-developed materials with facilitation instructions, minimizing delivery costs. Electronic media may also offer cost-effective teaching methods. Finally, the exchange of experiences among countries in the region can help to prevent duplication of efforts.

### B. Strategies Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

#### 1. The Starting Point: Specific Problems of Women Entrepreneurs

As mentioned earlier, entrepreneurship offers relatively more opportunities to career women than professional management. Owning one's business gives more control over the rewards from one's own efforts. Successful entrepreneurship involves the management of production, finance, and marketing, and a modern enterprise therefore requires skills acquired through formal schooling and/or apprenticeship as well as access to capital and markets.

Unfortunately, this means that there is a high threshold to modern entrepreneurship for the great majority of women in developing countries. The challenge for policy makers today is to find the means to develop the entrepreneurial potential of this majority, bridging the divide between low-income women and middle/high-income women. Realizing the entrepreneurial potential of the former means that several major problems have to be addressed:

- With little money and heavy domestic burdens, many women lack opportunities for formal training or acquiring experience in modern business and management skills.
- In some countries, such as Nepal, women do not have the same property rights as men (42), further limiting their financial independence.
- Access to credit is limited by their lack of collateral and of training in record keeping as well as the reluctance of banks to become involved in a multitude of small loan schemes, the attitude of loans officers and women's own hesitance to avail themselves of bank services.

- Limited financial means and lack of exposure to modern business makes women more adverse to taking-risks.
- Limited opportunities to develop external contacts and to participate in organized networks are barriers to the penetration of markets.

The promotion of small-scale enterprises has been identified as a priority area in the development policies of developing Asia. Consequently, training programmes, credit facilities, and marketing assistance are provided by many government and non-government organisations. While programmes often rightly stress an integrated approach, non-gender specific programmes may fail to address women's special handicaps. Specific programmes for women are therefore often required.

## 2. Distinguishing Between Entrepreneurs and Own-Account Workers

Support programmes for women have too often focussed on simple skills for livelihood or income generation, as in basket weaving or poultry raising. These are basically welfare programmes. Entrepreneurship development aims at economic growth. This requires not only higher technological skills; other (managerial, administrative, marketing) skills are also necessary for the successful operation of an enterprise. From this perspective, the common practice of income-generating projects to provide marketing and distribution systems for project output is a disservice to truly enterprising women if continued for any length of time. So are unsupervised credit facilities to the self-employed who are not versed in the fundamentals of business and management. In short, interventions should address the three areas of production technology, finance, and marketing at the same time.

While there should therefore be a conceptual distinction between these two kinds of activities, efforts should be made to identify, among beneficiaries of income generation projects, women who possess entrepreneurial traits. These traits include the propensity to take calculated risks, innovativeness, and a desire for autonomy. Such women can be encouraged to venture into full entrepreneurship by giving them access to further training, to seed capital, and to markets. This process will prepare the future entrepreneur for full independence which eventually ensures not only her own employment but the employment of others as well.

## 3. Training for Entrepreneurial and Management Skills

Training for entrepreneurial and for management skills have a different focus. The former should include modules in production technology, finance, administration, and marketing; the latter should include skills in planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. Equally important are programs which address gender-role difficulties of women.

Training programmes should be as close to business reality as possible. Preferably, trainers should have a business background - in the more advanced countries, retired businesswomen may be available in sufficient numbers for this task. Entrepreneurs and managers now active in their profession should also be involved in the training programmes, transferring recent experience, new business strategies, etc. which cannot be found in textbooks. The possibilities of traineeships should be explored.

Training programs can be made more affordable in several ways. Secondary trainers providing self-liquidating programs can be trained. Sponsoring organizations can provide loans for course participants, payable when the business starts to be

profitable. Such a scheme would have an added advantage of eliciting commitments from both trainer and participant-as both have a stake in the scheme's success. Again, an exchange of experiences between countries, especially those with a similar level of development, can do much to avoid duplication of efforts.

#### 4. Credit Facilities and Venture Capital

To overcome the credit problems women face (at least in the less advanced countries in the region), a number of innovative approaches have been tried. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has been very successful as a savings-and-loans bank for small enterprises predominantly run by women, with high repayment rates guaranteed by peer pressure. Co-operative small-scale credit schemes operate in, among others, Malaysia and Indonesia. A World Bank-funded project in the Philippines organizing associations among small-scale women entrepreneurs which would pool resources from among its members in order to establish a guarantee fund. Women's World Banking (WWB) projects have also been implemented in this country, and in Bangladesh. Women the world over are known to have very high repayment rates, and an expanded credit facility program can be financially self-liquidating once the mechanism is in place.

A form of financial intervention especially suitable for small and medium-scale enterprises is equity participation in promising ventures. There is, for example in the NICs, an ever increasing number of smaller well-managed firms in growth industries which only need an injection of funds for take-off. This potentially lucrative niche is currently not serviced because such firms are too big to meet the requirements for subsidized funding and too small to attract venture capital. But they can effectively absorb equity financing or collateralized loans from the same source, and make the venture profitable for both investor and entrepreneur.

#### 5. Access to Markets

Ways should be sought to increase women's access to and familiarity with markets. A number of governments have invited groups of women exporters from Asian countries to acquire first-hand experience of their potential market's preferences. The participation of women entrepreneurs in trade fairs and exhibitions has likewise been encouraged. An innovative programme whereby hands-on consulting services were provided to align the woman's product with market needs has been tried by at least one development bank in India. Payment for these services was in the form of a small percentage of the eventual profits to be realized. Women's professional organizations, finally, can play an active role in improving market access through co-operation with national and international Chambers of Commerce.

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