

# **Report of the Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten**

**3-5 May, 2005  
Islamabad, Pakistan**



**United Nations Development Fund for Women  
South Asia Regional Office  
New Delhi**

UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security. UNIFEM works in partnership with UN organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and networks to promote gender equality. It links women's issues and concerns to national, regional and global agendas, by fostering collaboration and providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies.

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The Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Meeting – “Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten”, was as special as the year 2005 itself. A year of milestones for gender equality, it marks the tenth anniversary of the historic Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing; 30 years since the First World Conference on Women at Mexico; and, five years since the Millennium Summit.

Keeping alive the promise of Beijing, this regional review process, which began in 1996, is a collaborative undertaking involving all stakeholders, including Governments, NGOs, the SAARC secretariat, gender experts, key research institutions and UN partners. These review meetings – five, including this one – have provided unique opportunities for developing an overarching framework of greater accountability to women and for a systematic tracking of progress on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in a sustained manner. Held in collaboration with host governments, the review meetings have a track record of facilitating cross-regional peer learning and sharing of best practices. Promoting introspection, identifying gaps and addressing challenges, they lead to the development of a common South Asian accountability and agenda of priorities for action.

This was the fifth in the series of the biennial regional reviews and it gives me great pleasure to share the journey and the results of this meeting with you through this report.

The levels of success achieved by this meeting were due to several factors. The level of collaboration and commitment by the Government of Pakistan, who so graciously co-hosted the meeting, was exemplary. We could not have achieved a higher level of political commitment, with the Honourable President of Pakistan welcoming the initiative and His Excellency, the Prime Minister, inaugurating it. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Government of Pakistan’s kind support and to extend my special thanks to Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Advisor to the Prime Minister for Women Development, for her outstanding leadership.

Indeed, without the dedication and commitment of our partners, with whom we are privileged to undertake this journey, this mechanism for gender rights could not be a success. Their generous sharing and unstinting support is a key element for making it so meaningful and sustained and I thank them warmly. For us at UNIFEM South Asia, the occasion was especially noteworthy as UNIFEM Executive Director, Dr. Noleen Heyzer, could be with us.

Afghanistan’s participation for the first time in this meeting, albeit as observer, made this event very special. The presence of its representatives added value to this conclave

of South Asian Nations and civil society. In addition, the timing of the Meeting was strategic, coming as it did, after the Beijing +10 review and before the review of the MDGs. It provided the perfect opportunity to unpack the Beijing Plus Ten document in the South Asian context, as well as adopt an action



declaration and strategies on crucial gender issues affecting women across countries in the region for the next two years. Practical and doable with actionable plans, the declaration captures the priorities of the South Asia region. Having already been shared in the ECOSOC process, it provides a strategic instrument for highlighting gender concerns at the Millennium Summit in September, when nations come together for the five-year review of the MDGs.

Prior to the regional biennial review and to set the context, UNIFEM offers a comprehensive analytical report, the “Progress of South Asian Women 2005”. This maps the situation and status of women in South Asia, within the parameters of the twelve critical areas of concern identified in the BPFA. The report this year was prepared by the Indian Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), under the dynamic scholarship of Dr. Ratna Sudarshan. I extend my sincere thanks to her and her expert team for producing an exemplary report.

This Report of the review itself, walks us through the packed three days which saw very generous sharing, vigorous debate and dialogue and indeed great learning. Participants took stock of progress made on the last strategic document (The Bhutan Forward-Moving Strategies), and strategized on areas of concern. While being a continuation of the process of regional sharing and learning, it provided an opportunity to focus on key regional priorities identified at Paro, Bhutan. The Report captures all the three sessions organized on the three issues which had been identified as pivotal for women of South Asia. I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the eminent gender advocates who prepared these – The Varied Contours of Violence Against Women by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women; Issues of Gender, Livelihoods and Resources by Dr. Govind Kelkar of the IFAD-UNIFEM Gender Mainstreaming Programme; and Women’s Leadership, Effectiveness and Representation by Ms. Khawar Mumtaz of Shirkat Gah. No less dynamic and equally generous, I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Prof. Savitri Goonesekere, former member of the CEDAW Committee and Ms. Salma Khan, member of the CEDAW Technical Committee, who added great

value and direction to the regional process through their expertise.

The other special feature of this regional meeting was the presence of the elected women representatives from different tiers of governance from some countries of the region, who told their stories of empowerment. We thus hear the voices of Begum Syeda Fatema Shaistha Banu of Bangladesh, Ms. Feroze Begum of India, Ms. Mishri Giri of Nepal and Mrs. Mehnaz Rafi of Pakistan, within the covers of this Report - sharing how they transformed power relations in order to create a new framework for the political empowerment of women in their respective countries.

The Report provides a one-stop resource for diverse learnings and good practices in the region, which were so generously shared by distinguished officials and experts. Mr. Kesang Wangdi, Director SAARC, shared information on the upcoming SAARC Gender Data Base, a joint undertaking of the SAARC Secretariat and UNIFEM to meet the challenges of inadequate, reliable and relevant sex disaggregated data and the need for a mechanism to statistically monitor progress. Information on how the media and ICT can be harnessed for the advancement of women was provided by Ms. Bandana Rana of Sancharika Samuha. Valuable information on using monitoring mechanisms and tools was provided by Dr. S.K. Nath, Additional Director General in the Ministry of Statistics in India, who focused on monitoring the MDGs; Prof. Mahmuda Islam of Women for Women, Bangladesh, on engendering the PRSPs and Mr. Shyam Sunder Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare, HMG/N, on making the linkages between the BPfA, CEDAW and the MDGS. I take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge their contributions and express my appreciation.

Providing an account of the progress made by member countries vis-à-vis implementation of the BPfA, the Report provides a source of updated information with regard to the advancement of women in South Asia. Recording the rich deliberations, it traces the journey of presentations, discussions and recommendations, which ended in the formulation and adoption, of the 'Islamabad Declaration: Review and Future Action'. It delineates a road-map for the journey ahead, as also enriching and influencing ongoing global processes.

This Report provides an excellent updated resource on gender equality and its journey in the region. Cutting edge gender concerns in the region have been culled and time-bound commitments made. Violence against women, the economic and political empowerment of women, disaster preparedness and management, and health and education identified as priorities, as well as specific actions to address

these. Also, the need for developing and strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equity and equality has been articulated.

The need of the hour is to unlock the commitments and focus on resolute implementation, accelerating progress and expanding its reach. Though not an easy task, the political will and vision of leaders of South Asian countries in tandem with the dynamism of civil society and the women's movement, provide enabling influences. We need to sustain and build on the current momentum.

We hope this report will be widely disseminated, reaching out to a much larger audience. Not only is this another milestone in South Asia's journey, but also at present, a stepping stone for gender equality and gender justice.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to Ms. Nilofer Bakhtiar, Adviser to the Prime Minister, Ministry of Women's Development, Government of Pakistan (GoP), and to Mr. Suhail Safdar, Secretary of the Ministry of Women Development, (GoP). Without their partnership and support, the meeting could not have achieved the success it did.

I would like to thank all the members of the UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office, for their wonderful teamwork and tireless efforts. I would especially like to acknowledge the key role played by Ms. Firoza Mehrotra, Ms. Gitanjali Singh and Ms. Mariam Mehdi. I thank Ms. Suneeta Dhar and Ms. Sangeeta Thapa for their support. My grateful thanks to the UNIFEM team of Ms. Anuradha Chandran, Mr. Chandrashekhar Iyer, Ms. Kalpana Gulati and Ms. Chinnamma Varghese for providing logistical support of a very high order. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Ms. Yasmin Zaidi, the Rapporteur of this Regional Conference, for taking the responsibility of putting together this comprehensive report and Ms. Josefina Oraa for editing this report.



31<sup>st</sup> October 2005

Chandni Joshi  
Regional Programme Director

The Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference – ‘Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten’ was held in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan from May 3-5, 2005 at Islamabad, Pakistan.

The Inaugural Session took place at the Convention Center in Islamabad. The Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Shaukat Aziz, inaugurated the meeting. It was addressed by Mr Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji, SAARC Secretary-General, Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Adviser to the Prime Minister, Women Development. Ms. Chandni Joshi, Regional Programme Director, UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office and Mr. Suhail Safdar, Acting Secretary, Ministry of Women Development, Government of Pakistan, were also present on the dais.

H.E Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Women Development, welcomed the delegates and thanked all the Honourable Ministers from the region, the SAARC Secretary-General and participants who were representing their countries and organizations at this conference. She expressed her gratitude to Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of UNIFEM, and Ms. Chandni Joshi for their relentless support and assistance for the cause of the women and for UNIFEM being always at the forefront as far as women's issues are concerned. She thanked and appreciated the Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan for being a true champion of the cause of women. She noted that plans and policies can be made but, without sincere commitment by the leadership of the country, no practical implementation can take place. This commitment was forthcoming from both the Prime Minister and the President of Pakistan whom she characterised as ‘gender-sensitive men’.

Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar remarked that the Conference would be reviewing, sharing and assessing the achievements since Beijing 1995, as well as taking into account the constraints and challenges faced. The Conference was also a celebration of the contributions women are making in every aspect of life - in the home, on the job, in the community, as mothers, as wives, as sisters, as daughters, as learners, as workers, as citizen and as leaders. Women are nurses, teachers, parliamentarians, leaders, government officers, development professionals, journalists, among many other roles. They are not silent spectators but are the voices of the people.

Noting that South Asia is home to more than one-third of humanity, half of which is represented by women, Ms. Bakhtiar lamented that the opportunities afforded to women as individuals for their own development and progress are inadequate. Grounded in poverty, and controlled by patriarchy, women have little ownership of property and other economic resources, including their

own labour, mobility, access to education and information. Noting that all the countries present have taken many initiatives to change the lives of their women, much more needs to be done.



She highlighted some of the progress made by Pakistan in the social, political and economic empowerment of women, especially where the Ministry of Women Development has played a key role in being the national focal machinery which has acted as a lobbyist, catalyst and promoter of the cause of women within the entire government structure and beyond. Some of the achievements included representation of women in all tiers of government, in politics and in positions of decision-making. Legislations have been enacted and amended to reflect women's rights such as the Citizenship Act, the ILO 100 on equal remuneration of women and men, Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance, the Honour Killing Bill, etc. Several mechanisms were set up, such as the National Commission on Status of Women, the Ministry of Women Development dedicated solely to women's advancement, the Gender Reform Action Plans' (GRAPs) wide-ranging reforms to engender the governance structure at the federal and provincial levels, Crisis Centers, Complaint Cells for Women at police stations to address violence against women. For economic advancement, the initiatives taken include Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Micro-credit programmes, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund created for poor rural and urban communities and the National Fund for the Advancement of Rural Women. In the health sector, there is a Women's Health Project which focuses on improving health, nutrition and social status of women and girls through the development of women-friendly health system in twenty district of Pakistan and, the Tawana Pakistan (School Nutrition Project) launched for girls in the age group of 5-12 years in 5300 schools in the 29 poorest rural districts of Pakistan.

In conclusion, the Advisor noted that Pakistan, like other developing countries, faced formidable challenges in the



full realisation of the objectives of the Beijing Conference and, much remains to be done towards gender equality, development and peace.

H.E. Mr. Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji, Secretary-General of SAARC, commended the Government of Pakistan and the UNIFEM Regional Office for South Asia for the excellent arrangements made to host this important event in Islamabad. He appreciated, in particular, the presence of His Excellency, Mr. Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan, as it signifies the importance of this conference and is a reflection of the commitment that he and his country attach to gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women. The Secretary-General congratulated the South



Asian Governments and the women's movements for enabling this unique, transparent accountability mechanism of review, peer learning and setting-out a plan of action for gender equality and women's rights for the next two years. The presence of Honourable Ministers and high-level decision-makers was an expression of their dedication and commitment towards women's issues, in general, and the Beijing Platform for Action, in particular.

Ten years after Beijing, in spite of the high priority accorded to women's issues, they continue to lag behind men for various reasons and are deprived of the options and opportunities to become equal partners in the development process. The vast majority continue to be exploited and dependent on men for survival. They are often deprived of their legitimate rights in their homes, schools, workplaces, societies and communities, at large. It is, therefore, important to closely monitor and review the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Secretary-General noted that since the inception of the regional cooperation in South Asia, SAARC has taken many initiatives towards addressing issues concerning women's empowerment. These issues have been included in the SAARC Integrated Programme of Action (SIPA) since 1986. Parallel to this official-level pursuit, political-level consultations have also been held to advance the cause of women. Four Ministerial Conferences have been held

on women's issues. Similarly, at the highest political level, the leaders have continued to stress on issues affecting women. The Declarations of the successive SAARC Summits have emphasized on the need to pay focused attention to these issues.

The Eleventh Summit in Kathmandu in 2002 is regarded as the regional breakthrough in addressing the plight of women with the signing of two landmark Conventions – The SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and, The Convention on Regional Arrangements for the promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia. These Conventions bring into sharp focus the need for concerted regional cooperation to secure the rights of women and children. They express the collective resolve of the governments of South Asia to treat trafficking in women and children for commercial sexual exploitation as a criminal offence of a serious nature and to place the child at the centre of national and regional programmes of the member-states. These Conventions await ratification by all Member-States. The Eleventh Summit also directed the formation of the SAARC Autonomous Women's Advocacy Group (SAWAG) from the Member-States to prepare and present a broad spectrum of gender issues to further uplift the social status of women and children in the region, and the Summit expressed its resolve to accord the highest priority to promoting social development through specific and targeted programmes. They also directed that necessary measures be taken to ensure that women achieve development to their full potential.

Another important document that would contribute towards the advancement of women in the region is the SAARC Social Charter, adopted at the Twelfth Summit in January 2004. The Charter, among other things, brings to the fore a regional dimension of action aimed at empowering women.

The Secretary-General commended UNIFEM for the various initiatives taken to advance the cause of women around the world and, particularly appreciated the efforts of Ms. Chandni Joshi, Regional Programme Director and her able team for their central role in guiding the SAARC region towards the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNIFEM in December 2001 was a welcome boost to the rich social agenda developed by SAARC over the years. The MoU aims to help member-countries in their efforts to achieve the goals of gender equality in terms of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing Plus Five Outcome Document. It also provides a mechanism for regional cooperation and collaboration and promotes mutual learning and cross-fertilization.

The Secretary-General reiterated that the SAARC Secretariat is committed to continue working towards supporting and sustaining processes leading to the

achievement of gender equality. It has already set in motion the development of a SAARC gender database in collaboration with the UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office to assist Governments and civil society of the region and is linking the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and the MDG processes for the achievement of the common goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. Concluding, he reiterated that countries have to accelerate implementation and take steps to ensure greater accountability.

Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women, said that it was a great privilege and honour for her to attend the Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference since Beijing. She extended her special gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for inviting her and for co-hosting this meeting with UNIFEM. In particular, she thanked the Advisor to the Prime Minister, Women Development, Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, for her outstanding leadership.

Dr. Noeleen Heyzer noted that this conference is one of the several important events in the year 2005, which marks both the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Millennium Summit in 2000. As such, it provides an opportunity to celebrate the progress, not only over the 10 years since the Beijing Conference, but over the 30 years since the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and to identify the major challenges that we still confront.



Recounting the many achievements to date, Dr. Heyzer noted that all governments in South Asia have ratified CEDAW, laws and constitutions are being reviewed and amended to address discrimination against women, national machineries have been set up, and all countries have adopted national plans for action for gender equality. Laws for women's economic security, against domestic violence, on gender-sensitive laws and policies on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care are being developed and adopted. South Asia is also exemplary in its systematic tracking of progress on the implementation of commitments, primarily through the biennial regional

review process. Most importantly, this regional review process is a collaborative undertaking involving all stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, the SAARC Secretariat, gender experts, key regional institutions and UN partners. Jointly hosted by regional governments and UNIFEM, they indicate commitment at the highest levels towards fully implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in South Asia.

Dr. Heyzer regretted that even so, progress has been too slow. Thirty years after the beginning of the Decade on Women, and ten years after Beijing, it is still a woman's face we see when we speak of poverty, of HIV/AIDS, of violent conflict and social upheaval, of trafficking in human beings. Laws and policy frameworks only go so far. For programmes promoting the empowerment of women and gender justice to succeed, they must necessarily be grounded in effective mechanisms of accountability to women. Too often, women describe how their experiences are not part of the policy discussion, yet, it is well-known that the most effective policy approaches come from listening to those who have experienced such problems first hand, who can provide needed perspectives, improve understanding and offer creative solutions so that resources may be used creatively.

Since Beijing, the world has seen dramatic economic changes, impacting the ability of countries to achieve the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs. Globalization – including trade liberalization, communications technologies, decentralization and migration – offers many potential benefits, but not to all. Inequalities have widened between rich and poor, men and women. Women are increasingly clustered in informal, low-wage employment, underrepresented in economic decision-making and denied equal access to resources such as property and inheritance rights, limiting their ability to benefit from globalization. Too often, this results in loss of livelihoods and increased vulnerability to violence, HIV/AIDS, unsafe migration and trafficking.

Cuts in government expenditure resulting from economic restructuring are also increasingly transferring the costs of adjustment to women, who are underrepresented in political decision-making. In the absence of a strong accountability framework, the impact of affirmative action policies to address this is limited. Further, harmful and discriminatory practices rooted in deep-seated cultural values and customary practices continue to perpetuate gender inequalities and women's exclusion from mainstream social, economic and political activities.

The four panels around which this meeting is organised focus on the pivotal issues for women of South Asia, identified as priorities at the previous review in Bhutan – including women's livelihoods, violence against women, HIV/AIDS, and women's political participation, as well as

the importance of implementing and accountability mechanisms. Dr. Noeleen Heyzer urged the meeting to focus on moving from commitments and words into action by identifying a few areas for action between now and the next meeting in two years, such as: a focus on removing all existing laws that discriminate against women, on building the capacities of institutions to deliver, on investing in women's organizing and building partnerships with men to strengthen gender advocates at all levels. She felt that this forum should be institutionalised so that it becomes the South Asian network of women Ministers and leaders to support each other, to share challenges and solutions to create lives free of violence, poverty and discrimination. There was a need to define a single, clear set of benchmarks for monitoring progress on implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment that includes CEDAW, the Beijing Platform and the MDGs. Gender mainstreaming must be combined with renewed investment in women's human rights.

Adequate resources are needed and she mentioned the assistance provided by UNIFEM to governments on gender-budget, but equally gender-sensitive aid architecture designed by the donor community is needed. The effective strategies for achieving gender equality developed over the past 30 years through efforts to implement CEDAW and the Beijing Platform can be upscaled and utilised in strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are not just a set of targets and indicators but, rather, a set of principles and commitments that put a priority on achieving a world free of poverty, violence and inequality.

Concluding, Dr. Noeleen Heyzer emphasised that the conference brings alive the energy of the Beijing process and carries forward the Beijing torch of equality, development and peace, indicating again the commitment of countries of the region to the world's women. It demonstrates the special partnership that exists between Governments, the SAARC Secretariat, key regional institutions, UNIFEM and UN partners and women's groups. The need is to now urgently move forward on implementation, accountability and adequate resources to bring about a world in which people live lives that are free of want and free of fear. A world where there is development, security and rights for all. We owe this to the next generation.

The Honourable, Mr. Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan, welcomed all the distinguished delegates and remarked that he was deeply honoured and privileged to inaugurate the Fifth South Asian Regional Ministerial Meeting to celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Beijing Conference. He commended the other South Asian Governments, UNIFEM and Pakistan's Ministry of Women Development for keeping the Beijing torch alive by providing a platform and facilitating countries of the region

to come together to jointly introspect, share and assess their achievements as well as gaps and challenges so that strategies and priorities for the future are chalked out. It was a matter of pride that South Asia is perhaps the only region in the world which is following this practice. The ten year review of Beijing called attention to many areas where women's equalities are still not a reality, given pervasive denial of opportunities to women in accessing resources, low female enrolment, high maternal mortality and lack of equal access under law to land and property.

H.E Mr. Shaukat Aziz stated that there is consensus that empowering women is the most effective tool for development as well as for poverty reduction. Constraints such as ignorance, stereotypical mindsets as well as prejudices hinder progress. The Prime Minister noted that efforts to integrate and advance women's social, political and economic agenda have to consider the social – cultural environment and to build on the positive traditions and customs.



One of the greatest challenges the region faces is the feminization of poverty. Women's work is mostly invisible and not accounted for in national statistics. Globalization has accentuated the problem but it also provides an opportunity, which may be turned into an advantage for women. Globalization and the new regimes of WTO also bring new opportunities and greater access to resources and markets but women's capacity and skills must be enhanced to seize these opportunities. The Government of Pakistan has created two new full-fledged Divisions of Women Development and of the Textile Industry to promote and protect women's concerns. The ultimate goal is to add value in the production chain and link women producers to the local, national and global market.

Mr. Shaukat Aziz reiterated his government's commitment to the empowerment of women. In this context, he mentioned some of the initiatives undertaken by the Government of Pakistan in the recent past. Women's political empowerment is an area where Pakistan has set a model in the region. Women's over-all representation



in the legislature is 20%. In absolute numbers, they are 233 out of a total of 1170 legislators. Similarly, women have 33% representation at all tiers of local government. Two women federal Ministers, five women Ministers of States, six women provincial Ministers, ten women Parliamentary Secretaries, twelve women Chairpersons of Standing Committees of the Senate and the National Assembly are indicative of the Government's firm resolve in power-sharing and decision-making. He expected this critical mass of women politicians to come forward and do its agenda-setting for forward-moving strategies in all areas of development.

Recounting some of the other initiatives taken for women's advancement, the Prime Minister reiterated that the Government will do its utmost to work towards zero-

tolerance against violence against women. He noted that considerable progress has been made in the last decade in laying the legal framework to meet the commitments made to women in terms of equality, development and peace. It was now time to take the necessary next steps to improve national and regional accountability and implementation. Women's experiences, perspectives and contributions must play a role in the efforts to increase equality among all peoples, to build a global commitment to human development, human rights and human security as an alternative to violence and inequities.

The inauguration ended on a high note, as the speeches were followed by a colourful ceremony, with children performing the traditional dances of each of the SAARC countries.



Welcoming all the distinguished delegates, Ms. Chandni Joshi expressed special thanks to the Government of Pakistan for co-hosting the biennial meeting and deep appreciation to Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Advisor on Women Development to His Excellency, the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Remarking that the meeting had a special significance this year as it closes the loop of ten years from Beijing, Ms. Joshi set the context of the meeting and, in particular, the emergence and relevance of the forum, the South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference.

UNIFEM has been working in South Asia since the early 1990s. UNIFEM and the women's movement in South Asia, active since the last three decades, came together with the mutual realisation that each was a natural ally for the other. UNIFEM emerged from the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, which made a strong call for a specialised UN agency focusing on women's rights and development.

Fast-forward to 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing saw 40,000 women and representatives from almost 200 governments come together, committing themselves to the Beijing Platform for Action which ensued from the conference. The Beijing Fourth World Conference provided women the space to raise their concerns on a very large platform. Various governments got the message that women's issues are not limited to issues of welfare but directly linked to policies relating to different sectors and broader issues and that interventions for women require the highest degree of political will.

UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office has taken the Beijing Platform for Action forward since. After Beijing, UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office has been hosting biennial meetings jointly with governments in South Asia, bringing together all the SAARC countries to talk about their work towards advancing women's rights in the region, despite conflicts within some of the countries and part of the region. A year after Beijing on September 9, 1996, UNIFEM hosted the very first South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference in India.

The whole thrust of the conferences has always been to capture the voices of women and ensure that, more than just global events, these conferences become women's events. The process has been very important because it has brought together all stakeholders, particularly the government, the women's groups, the civil society and various non-government organisations working on the ground. The significance of the forum has also been that the policy-makers, the leaders and the ministers involved in implementing the Beijing Declaration can take stock of ground realities and, at the same time, exchange views with the leaders from other countries. In all these, UNIFEM

acts as a facilitator and identifies emerging issues and catalytic areas for regional cooperation.

Over the years, an identity for the forum has emerged.

In the first conference in Delhi, meeting modalities were discussed, including frequency and the agenda, among others. The way the forum has evolved can be traced through the Outcome Declarations at the end of each meeting. The first Declaration (1996) referred to a broad vision & scenario but the Kathmandu Declaration (1998) from the second meeting reflected the emerging partnership between governments and NGOs, and prioritisation of the region's issues. Questions were raised about how to take the agenda forward, e.g. identifying the research to be done, the kind of institutional mechanisms needed for follow up, etc. The third meeting in Male (2000) came at a very critical juncture where the human rights of women were officially being recognised and articulated in progressive language. The Paro Declaration (2003) outlined the way forward thus, aptly called the Paro Forward-Moving Strategies. There were three areas which came out of the Declaration, with more focus given to research initiatives.

On reflection, the South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference is distinctly different from other fora for women's concerns, primarily because the dynamics are different: the agenda is very much that of the participants'; the process has been built and sustained over time; and the momentum and direction are generated from within the forum and not externally imposed. These are probably the reasons why the Beijing torch has continued aflame in South Asia to date.

In all development debates, one hears about lack of political will and the need for appropriate accountability mechanisms. In our case, three things characterise the South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference:

- One, it is a very unique forum that has the complete backing of the Governments. Their political will is evident through the presence of Ministers and senior officials and the presentation of an official report on the status of women in the different countries.
- Two, it is an accountability forum where the governments are monitoring their own progress, looking at the gains that have been achieved in the region and identifying the gaps.
- Three, it suggests concrete actions to be taken up.

South Asia's experience was showcased and recognised as a best practice at the CSW meeting in New York in March, 2005. Ms. Joshi informed the meeting that a



documentary, "The Power of Doing", is being made as a testimony to the process that the South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference has gone through. The first 'draft' version of the film was screened in New York at the CSW in March, 2005 and shall also be presented at the Islamabad meeting. Interviews with some of the participants of this meeting shall also be included in the final version of the film.

For every conference, a background document is prepared to review work in the context of the Beijing Platform for Action over a period, and published accordingly as "The Progress of Women in South Asia". For this meeting, three eminent persons have prepared papers on issues that this forum wanted to discuss more substantively: The first paper is by Dr. Govind Kelkar on "Gender, Livelihoods, and Resources". The second paper is by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy on "The Varied Contours of Violence in South Asia". The third paper is by Ms. Khawar Mumtaz on "Women's Leadership, Effectiveness and Representation". Women elected representatives from the different tiers of governance in various countries are also present to share their experiences. We have in our midst a Village Committee Representative from Nepal, a Municipal Committee Representative from India, a District Committee Representative from Bangladesh and a Parliamentarian from Pakistan. Additionally, as identified at the meeting in Paro, tools for gender auditing will be presented here by experts.

However, Beijing Plus Ten is not enough. This momentum has to be sustained further and the on-going synergy has to be maintained, if not enriched. If we are serious about equity and equality, then we are really looking for gender justice and, therefore, the process has to go on. UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office will continue to be a catalyst in the process, a trendsetter and a pioneer for women's rights and, it will continue to respond to the continuing challenges in South Asia.

## Progress of Women in South Asia

Dr. Ratna M. Sudarshan

Director

Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi, India

The presentation by Dr. Ratna Sudarshan, Director of ISST in New Delhi, was based on the report "Progress of Women in South Asia" which had been prepared by a team of staff and consultants at ISST. The report reviewed the progress of women, with a special focus on some of the key issues that emerged in the context of South Asia, during the last five years.

South Asia has witnessed the trend of globalisation, trade liberalisation and the corresponding changes in the macro-economic policy framework unfold in its midst.

This has been associated with higher rates of migration than in the past and a slower pace of change in social norms. This context – of very rapid change in some aspects and very little change in others, poses a series of challenges as well as opportunities.

## Significant Achievements

One of the most significant achievements is the much greater visibility of women at different levels of decision-making and, to a large extent, this has been made possible by reservations and quotas introduced in all countries. At the same time, there has been a remarkable progress at the policy level, which marks the commitment of the various governments: the formulation of national plans for the empowerment of women, the engendering of the census and other data collection mechanisms, gender budget analysis and tools. There have also been a large number of regional agreements which mark a joint commitment towards taking action, for example, the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002), the Regional Campaign on Violence against Women, the catalysing networks such as the South Asia Forum against Trafficking, South Asian Women Entrepreneurs, Network of Feminist Economists, NGO-SAARC Women for Peace, the Positive Women's Network and other networks. An important initiative that is currently in progress is the development of a gender database for South Asia, which will be located at the SAARC Secretariat. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed between SAARC and UNIFEM.

The governments of the SAARC countries committed themselves to taking action in the twelve priority areas highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action. The key *issues, initiatives, gaps and challenges* in each of these 12 areas are presented in the following paragraphs.

## Women and Poverty

The national poverty lines in South Asia range from 25% to almost 50% of the population. While the data on the gendered incidence of poverty is not very good, there is enough evidence to show that there is feminisation of poverty linked to a combination of macro-policy and technological choices that reinforce pre-existing constraints, reflecting social and cultural norms. Initiatives taken by different countries include attempts to engender macro-economic policy and the PRSP in particular, gender budgeting, formulation of national plans for women's empowerment, and an important intervention across the region, micro-credit. Even so, challenges and gaps remain. There is a need to look at poverty in relation to the linkages between macro-economic policies, environmental policy issues and address gender as a cross-cutting issue. There is a need to continue and



strengthen efforts to improve women's access to productive resources, skill training in new technologies, social protection, and better implementation of the existing programmes of poverty alleviation. Commercial banks should mainstream credit and micro-finance for women. Extensive sex-disaggregated data is essential.

## Education and Training for Women

This is an area where there has been significant progress as commitment to education is generally very high, especially at the primary level, as may be gleaned from the increasing enrolment rate. The Maldives and Sri Lanka have reached gender parity in primary enrolment. A number of interesting governmental and non-governmental initiatives have been undertaken, such as incentives to enroll all children especially girls into school, and innovative efforts to eliminate gender stereotyping in



textbooks and choice of subjects. At the same time, the enrolment of girls is still lower than that of boys and there is a higher drop-out rate of girls particularly between the ages of 11-14 years. There is gender stereotyping in curriculum and subjects, suggesting that the socialisation process that takes place through the education system which reflects societal norms has not changed much. This is a particular challenge because we do not have a common schooling system. Disparity in quality of education is evident from the varied inputs by the public, the private and the non-formal sectors of education, undermining the required universal standards in school education. The quality of education received and the relevance of the curriculum are as important as raising enrolment rates or bringing all girls to school. There is inadequate empirical data for monitoring learning achievement by gender. Inadequate resources and dependence on external aid for education marks the sector.

## Women and Health

Women and Health is an area of concern as all South Asian countries, excluding Sri Lanka, are in the high child and adult mortality stratum (World Health Report, 2004). Socio-cultural norms result in early marriage, young motherhood, malnutrition, anaemia, and son-preference. At the same time, lack of sanitation and safe drinking

water and the renewed incidence of infectious diseases aggravate the problem and, within this context, the spread of HIV/AIDS poses a great challenge. Initiatives taken at the policy level include an enabling framework that would increase the infrastructure of health services and the health-seeking behaviour of women. An important and positive development is that violence against women is now being seen as a public health concern. Special attention is being paid to HIV/AIDS across the region, where data suggest that an estimated 37% of those infected are women. Challenges include the need to adopt a rights-based approach and to strengthen women as agents in health related policies, finding effective ways of addressing the impact of violence on their health, as well as meeting the needs of women with disabilities. There is a need for increased facilities and resources for all aspects of women's health, not only those related to reproduction but also those for addressing reproductive morbidities.

Mental health is emerging as an area that requires more investment. The overall public health spending needs to go up significantly if gains are to be made. At the same time, it is important to build up the supportive role of men and boys, to address issues like women's health-seeking behaviour and the impact of violence, among others. Just raising the age at marriage may lead to a reduction in several maternal health issues.

## Violence Against Women

Violence against Women (VAW) is the fourth area under the BPFA. Initiatives taken to address VAW include some legislative measures to protect women and girls from violence. There is recognition of the physical and mental health outcomes of violence, as well as the economic costs thereof.

Currently, national and regional measures have been taken to counter trafficking. In terms of gaps and challenges, intersectionality or forms of multiple discrimination against women needs to inform policy reforms and the responses towards VAW. There is a need to continue and sustain the campaign for the implementation of CEDAW and the removal of reservations. Data on the incidence of violence needs to improve in order to better strategise for responses. There is a need to set up adequate one-stop crisis centres across countries with trained staff, as well as to increase resources allocated to dealing with violence against women and girls. At the same time, gender-sensitisation to change mind-sets and work with men and boys to address gender-based violence and intergenerational socialisation patterns is required. Community-based gender-sensitive initiatives to build leadership are needed. Countries need to encourage women's economic independence, through



property/ land and inheritance rights, access to credit and economic opportunities, etc., so that women can move away from violent relationships

## **Women in Armed Conflict**

It has been noted that conflict leads to increased sexual violence, prostitution and trafficking. Rape and HIV/AIDS are seen as weapons of war. Conflict affects women's economic security. Women's literacy and education are crucial for them to participate fully in peace-building.

An initiative to further women's role in peace-building is the UNIFEM-organised Round Table on Women and Peace in Kathmandu in 2004. Resolution 1325 adopted by consensus in 2000 by the Security Council addresses the need for social protection of women in conflict situations and tasks the UN system and member states to ensure the integration of gender into all aspects of peace and security work.

Lack of sex-disaggregated data impedes the formulation of appropriate interventions at the right point. There has to be a stronger representation of women's resources, experiences and perspectives in peace-building and peace-making processes, as well as in post-conflict interventions and the protection of women's human rights at every stage of the process. The review also identified the need for gender sensitisation at all levels of policy formulation and implementation of peace and reconstruction efforts, including integrating gender analysis as part of early-warning activities and conflict-prevention measures. Another gap noted is the lack of social protection for affected women, especially with a focus on single women, widowed women and female-headed households

## **Women and the Economy**

In terms of the overall macro-economic picture, there is very little change – or no change in the female activity rate. And, there is no change in female activity rate or ratio of female-earned income to male activity rate or earned income since 2002. Female work force continues to be concentrated in informal, home-based, part-time work and piece-rate contract, but also as unpaid helpers. At the micro-level, groups of women have been able to access new opportunities but, this has not made an impact on the overall situation at the macro-level which does not appear to have changed. Initiatives have been taken to strengthen women's access to resources and to improve income through access and control over land and through networking, e.g. HomeNet South Asia, a network in South Asia, set up for lobbying and advocacy and to develop marketing networks and inputs across the region. Globalisation and trade pose a major challenge to women who are concentrated in certain types of traditional

activities where both market and technology are affected by the changing context. Much more needs to be done for women's skill enhancement and capacity-building, especially in the context of new technologies like ICTs, improving education, access to markets and credit as well as social protection and the provision of a non-discriminatory environment for women. These are all areas in which initiatives have indeed been started but a lot more needs to be done to ensure that the changes that are taking place in the economic context have outcomes for women. This is also an area in which joint and concerted effort is needed by national governments, international governments, voluntary agencies and civil society organisations. Migrant women workers have emerged as a group, that is in need of safety nets and protection of rights, both in the country of origin and the country of employment. Again, the need exists to put in social security mechanisms for women in all kinds of situations.

## **Women in Power and Decision Making**

In South Asia, the visibility of women, particularly at the local-level decision-making bodies, has increased dramatically in the last ten years. This has, of course, been possible because of quotas and reservations, though the policies vary in different countries. There is a need to create quotas at national and international levels, as well as to build upon the visibility that has been created. In order to increase women's role in development decisions and conflict resolution, there is a need to strengthen legal and political literacy. There is also a need to strengthen links between the women's movement and women politicians and, to create and strengthen women's information system for women, who have been elected to different positions. The report notes that gender-sensitive decentralisation of resources would make devolution more effective and meaningful. There is also a need to strengthen the role of men in increasing women's participation in decision-making and to use the media to encourage debate thus, helping in ending stereotyped imagery.

## **Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women**

Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have ministerial-level institutional mechanisms to oversee and monitor implementation of the BPFA and, in all the countries, partnerships with the non-governmental sector have been extremely important in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The report notes that while each country has a National Plan of Action, there are gaps and challenges in its implementation and in the setting-up of monitoring systems to encourage implementation of international commitments. National machineries are often under-resourced and marginalised and, there is a need to increase the resources (financial, technical, human

and physical) available to them. Across the twelve areas as in this one, the report emphasises the need for collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data at the household, community and national levels and for capacity-building within the government as well as with the constituencies. There have been pilot initiatives across the region on gender-budgeting, which now needs to be institutionalised. To strengthen impacts across sectors, duplication and confusion in mandate of agencies has to be avoided.

## Human Rights of Women

All countries in the region have been able to report on CEDAW and a number of countries have alternative reports. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have ratified the Optional Protocol while Nepal has signed it. Legislation for women's economic, political and social rights in the region picked up after the signing and reporting on CEDAW but the progress has been slow. The review, modification or withdrawal of reservations and declarations remains a challenge, and compliance with reporting, encouraging alternative reporting and ratification of the Optional Protocol, are outstanding issues. At the national level, there is a need to amend discriminatory legislation and to continue legal reform and advocacy to bring congruence between the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination and laws/legal system.

The region needs to strengthen the legal system by engendering the substance of the law and strengthening gender-sensitive implementation and interpretation of laws. The legal system must be accessible, especially for women. The law must be informed by inclusive social analysis and gender-sensitive legal and judicial reform processes. Training of law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, the health care providers, the social service sectors, the media and the elected representatives, is necessary to ensure adequate appreciation of women's human rights. The challenge with regard to changing attitudes and prejudices at the community level (campaigns for raising public awareness on rights, legal literacy, etc.) is to increase public awareness on human rights, women's rights, and encourage greater male involvement and participation.

## Women and the Media

The critical role of media in awareness-raising, sensitisation and communication is well-recognised. The report notes that most radio and TV stations in South Asia are government-owned. There has been an increase in women journalists, networks and programmes as also new alternative media forms in which women have been playing a greater role. Community radio is increasingly being explored by communities, sometimes ahead of government permission. The challenge is to continue to

expand the spaces that are available for women within traditional and alternative/ parallel media forms. Training on gender-sensitive reporting and programming is needed, as portrayal of women in stereotyped roles continues. There is also a need to project more positive and empowering aspects of women. Gender-sensitive media laws and codes of conduct, broadcast norms for equitable and realistic representations of women, self-regulatory mechanisms for media and legal protection for women journalists, are the challenges that remain. Media regulatory and monitoring mechanisms at regional and national level are also required.

## Women and the Environment

The importance of engendering environmental initiatives is well-recognised and the recent tsunami has brought this need to the forefront. Unfortunately, the region has little experience in this regard and, therefore, there is a need to engender development patterns and policies. The challenge is to acknowledge, preserve and use women's knowledge and expertise in managing resources, to protect the interests of women within local communities and to encourage active participation of men and women in natural resource management, research planning and decision-making at all levels. Gender mainstreaming in the policies and operations of all natural resource management institutions, engendering all environmental agreements, projects and programmes, and sex-disaggregated data on environmental concerns, are gaps identified by the report.

## The Girl Child

In spite of the many initiatives taken for improving the status of women and girls in the region, unfortunately, practices like dowry, child marriage, desertion, honour killings, among others, continue to create an environment in which the girl child is particularly vulnerable. There is also evidence of sex-selective abortion and a lower commitment to the education of the girl child in comparison to the boy child. It is also true that changing cultural norms requires, the full co-operation of traditional sources of authority. Rights of the girl child in some countries in the region remain violated in several aspects. Prevailing patriarchal and stereotypical attitude in some countries of South Asia have a negative impact on women's health and nutrition. Girls in the region continue to suffer from malnutrition. Mortality rates of girls under the age of five years remain high. Low enrolment and high drop-out rate of girls from school still prevail in the region. There is a need for an effective machinery to enforce the rights of the girl child, implement the minimum age of marriage, and deal with specific issues that have emerged, like malnutrition. Inadequacy of sex-disaggregated data must be corrected, in order to take

genuine stock of the situation and promote the development of the girl child.

Cross-cutting concerns mentioned in the report emphasise the need, firstly, for linkages across sectors and themes of the 12 areas of concern to figure more strongly in policy, e.g. economic policy and poverty, health and economic implications of violence, etc. Secondly, there is a need to involve men and boys in efforts to improve women's status and level of participation in all areas. Thirdly, the report notes the need to encourage socially-embedded community-based initiatives, without which there is often a backlash that hinders progress. Fourthly, there is a need for the generation and analysis of sex-disaggregated data across

the board and, of course, better implementation of existing programmes.

## Looking ahead

The Report concludes that the South Asian context is one, where there are constraints, there are challenges and opportunities, as well as a high level of commitment. The region has seen much progress and faces new challenges. The Report urges that the pace of progress be ensured and that change attempts be socially-embedded through the involvement of the community, including men and boys. In order to achieve the targets of the Beijing Platform for Action, there is also a need to engender the Millennium Development Goals.



## Commitments, Action Plans and Challenges

Chaired by H.E. Ms. Zaahiya Zareer  
Minister of Gender, Family Development and Social Security  
Government of Maldives

### Bangladesh

H.E. Khurshid Zahan Haque, Minister, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, extended her thanks to UNIFEM for organising the Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference – "Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten" at Islamabad and to the Government of Pakistan for hosting it. She expressed her appreciation for the forum which provides a unique opportunity for South Asia to reaffirm the commitments made at Beijing.

The Minister noted that the Government of Bangladesh has always been a party to on-going international efforts with a view to ensuring women's advancement. It has actively participated in all four world conferences on women and reiterates its commitment to the fulfillment of the objectives of the conferences. The Government of Bangladesh has also actively participated in the regional meetings and reported on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in the national context, the most recent being in Bhutan in May, 2003 and in Bangkok in September, 2004.

The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs was established in 1978 by President Zia-ur-Rahman. Bangladesh ratified the Beijing Platform for Action without any reservation and reported to the UN on the progress of BPFA and the obstacles and challenges faced through various regional and preparatory fora, e.g. First South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference held in New Delhi, India in 1996 and the Second South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference held in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1998. Bangladesh also presented its report to the UN at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly Meeting on Women, 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty First Century (the Beijing Plus Five Meeting).

The Government of Bangladesh has formulated a National Policy and a National Action Plan for women's advancement. The formulation of a national plan has brought the government and its development partners - NGOs, civil society and women's organisations, together on one platform. Fifteen ministries were identified as line or sectoral ministries in the 12 areas of critical concern and have their respective plan of action for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which the Ministry of Women and Children's



Affairs coordinates and monitors through a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee headed by the Minister.

The Government of Bangladesh has been working relentlessly to fight poverty with a special focus on women and, the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is taking special interest in the country's poverty alleviation programme. Special measures have been taken for women's economic empowerment through their participation in income-generating activities. The Bangladesh Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is in its final stage of formulation.

An amount of Taka (Tk) 34.5 million has been allocated in the non-development budget of the current fiscal year (2004-2005) for financing micro-credit and there is another Tk. 520 million allocated in the development budget of various ministries and departments which are implementing micro-credit programmes. Specifically, the Department of Livestock is implementing the Participatory Livestock Development Project (PLDP) covering 0.35 million women beneficiaries. The Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and Palli Karmo Shahayak Foundation are reaching more than 364,000 rural poor of which at least 50% are women. As per the World Bank Report (2004), about 12 million women are micro-credit borrowers with loans of 1.2 billion dollars and the loan repayment rate is 90%. The Vulnerable Group Development Programme (VGD), probably the largest development intervention, is part of the on-going effort to reach the poorest of the poor, especially women. Around 750,000 women including female-headed households received training in marketable income-generating skills, nutrition and other relevant trades, contributing to the improvement of the living standard. The Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP) benefits 42,000 women in 61 districts. Allocations for "Allowances for Widows and Destitute Women" have been increased.

The Government of Bangladesh has taken steps in enhancing the literacy rate in the country as well as making education free for all children, with a special focus on the girl-child. Female students of class VI-X in 460 class sub-districts are being awarded stipends



since 1993. Tuition fees for female students of up to grade XII have been waived and they are also provided with additional financial assistance for purchasing books as well as payment of examination fees. Approximately 5.57 million female students at secondary and higher secondary levels are getting stipends through five large projects. Another 6 million benefit from stipends for primary school students where the enrolment ratio of female/male student was 45:55 in 1991, increasing to 50:50 in 2002. The drop-out rates of female students at junior and secondary levels have correspondingly decreased. According to the World Bank Report of 2004, Bangladesh has one of the highest primary school enrolment rates in the developing world, including the enrolment of poor children. Bangladesh has achieved gender parity at the primary and lower secondary level. It is a government policy to recruit 60% female teachers in Government primary schools. Vocational training and human resource development specifically for women is undertaken by various Ministries.

Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in the area of primary health care, with an increase in life expectancy and a reduction in maternal mortality rate from nearly 6 per 1,000 live births in the 1990s to between 3.2 and 4.0 in 2001. The Government aims to reduce the maternal mortality rate to 2.75 per thousand live births and the total fertility rate (TFR) from 3.3 to 2.8 by 2015. Amongst other things, the Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme's Essential Services Package includes a focus on maternal health and a school health programme for adolescent reproductive health awareness. Contraception use is reported to be high. Recognising that women are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, a "women's wing" of the National AIDS Committee was established to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS issues related to women.

The Minister informed the forum that the Government of Bangladesh has enacted several laws such as the *The Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act 2002*, *Acid Control Act 2002*, *Acid Crime Control Act 2002* and *Speedy Trial Tribunal Act 2002*, to prevent violence against women. Other initiatives include a one-stop crisis centres (and a planned DNA lab) to provide legal, medical and other required assistance to women and victims of violence, Safe Custody Homes for Women and awareness-raising on the issues. Trafficking of Women and Children has received special attention and the Ministry of Home Affairs has been regularly monitoring the disposal of cases of human trafficking and combating it through an 18-member inter-ministerial committee.

As of now, there is no armed conflict in Bangladesh and, as such, the victimisation of women on account of armed conflict in Bangladesh does not exist.

Women's participation in economic activity is increasing at faster rate than that of the male labour force, the highest being in the informal sector (private, 22.7%), followed by formal sector (private, 6.2%). In the formal sector, women are in the Government service (11.9%) and non-profit institutions (44.2%). Export-oriented industries have boosted employment of women and an estimated 1.8 million women now work in development sector alone. Among the professional, technical, administrative and managerial groups, female employment is high in public/autonomous and private formal sector. On the other hand, private informal work are in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and transport service. Female sale and service workers are also mostly in the private informal sector.

To encourage women to join the civil service, a recruitment quota of 10% in officer ranks and 15% quota in other jobs have been introduced. Men and women in the public sector enjoy the same benefits and amenities including pay, allowances, pension and other financial benefits. Paid maternity leave has been increased from three to four months and, day-care centres have been set up in office premises in the Secretariat.

At the local government level, one third of the members of Union Parishad are women, elected through direct elections. A recent provision raises the number of reserved seats for women in Parliament from 30 to 45 (in a house of 300 members).

In terms of institutional mechanisms, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs plays a key coordinating and advocacy role. There is a National Council for Women's Development, with ministerial level representation of various ministries and also representatives of the civil society as members, chaired by the Prime Minister.

There is a permanent Law Commission aimed to promote gender equality in the legal system and review discriminatory laws, among others. Family courts with lower cost and simplified procedure have been instituted and arrangement has been made for support, where required, to finance cost of litigation.

The media is active in promoting gender equality and rights of women through a balanced and positive portrayal of women. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MWCA) conducted a series of training on gender-responsive reporting for editors of newspapers, film producers, scriptwriters, censor board members, performers, radio and television programme producers. The increasing number of women in media is showing positive impact and there are 150 women journalists in Bangladesh today.

There is also a National Plan of Action for Children which emphasises the rights of the girl child and focuses on five

areas, e.g. Food and Nutrition, Health, Education and Empowerment of the Girl Child, Protection from Abuse, Exploitation and Violence and Physical Environment. In addition to the National Children Policy, other policies have been formulated such as education policy, health policy, safe water supply and sanitation policy and nutrition policy to improve the quality of life of the children, with specific focus on girls.

The Minister mentioned that South Asian countries were prone to natural disasters and that women and children were the worst affected. There was a need to adopt measures to alleviate the suffering of women and children due to natural calamities. She said that although considerable progress has been made in this regard, a lot more needs to be done.

The Government has adopted a National Environment Management Plan (NEMAP). The relationship of women with the environment is considered to be one of the key areas of intervention. All projects dealing with the environment must have a gender perspective and take into account the needs and concerns of women and especially rural women.

In terms of achieving the goal of gender equality in all spheres of national life, the Minister stated that with the support of the national, regional and international agencies, the Government is confident of achieving these goals in the near future. To promote the work already being done vis-à-vis women, she was pleased to announce that the Government had requested UNIFEM to set up its programme office in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh also announced that they would be honoured to host the next biennial meeting and look forward to welcoming the delegates in Bangladesh.

## Response from Civil Society

Ms. Ayesha Khanam of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, and Ms. Salma Khan, CEDAW Committee Member, Bangladesh, acknowledged the Government of Bangladesh's strong policies to bring about gender equality and improve the condition of women and children in the country, as well as in making progress in the key priority areas in Bangladesh over the last two years.

Ms. Ayesha Khanam noted that the declining representation of women in parliament was a matter of concern, although there are many positive experiences in the Union Councils and at the grassroot level such as having a woman elected as City Commissioner.

Violence against women remains an issue. Bangladesh has laws addressing VAW but laws alone are not enough and innovative strategies to prevent violence against women are needed. A few participants shared strategies

adopted by community women to counter domestic violence, e.g. women who are members of a local community group would disclose to their fellow members that they had experienced domestic violence and the local group would then go and talk to the husband, ask him to desist from such act of violence. In some places, women would alert the community for support when there is incidence of domestic violence in the neighbourhood by beating on pots, pans and other kitchen utensils to create noise and, community members would then come to the woman's rescue. Other participants noted with concern the increase in migration of women, trafficking and forced prostitution.

Civil society representatives noted the many positive developments and initiatives taken by the Ministry, especially with regards to gender mainstreaming and the comprehensive institutional arrangement for facilitating the same. However, it was observed that the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is constrained by inadequate human resources and budgetary allocations to implement its mandate of mainstreaming and coordination. Members urged donors to support the development of a long term strategy for strengthening the Ministry rather than by supporting projects that could only further burden the Ministry.

Participants commended the institutionalised mechanism for government and civil society networking and collaboration developed by the Ministry and noted that it can serve as a model for replication in other countries. New initiatives such as policy research and engendering the national budget in year 2000 were appreciated, but it was urged that a monitoring mechanism be added. A few participants commented on the micro-credit and skill development programmes for women and wondered about its impact on poverty.

Ms. Mahmuda Islam noted that there were several studies and researches undertaken to look at the impact of micro-credit programme on women in the ready-made garment industry. Micro-credit programmes have contributed towards empowerment of women to some extent, enabling them to set up their own enterprises. Studies show that there have been some gains but, there are concerns that micro-credit programmes cannot really bring women out



of the poverty situation. Recently, the Bangladesh government and several organisations are focusing more on developing women entrepreneurs. There is no exact data about the specific extent of poverty among women as the national data is not sex-disaggregated. This is another gap and there are efforts to develop a database along these lines.

The group also noted that growing globalisation presents new opportunities and challenges to policy makers who should take steps to minimise negative effects on women and men. The advancement of new technologies poses a threat to women in the workforce who are employed in semi-skilled areas and the issues of workers must be taken into account for future strategies.

Chaired by H.E. Ms. Zaahiya Zareer  
Minister of Gender, Family Development and Social Security  
Government of Maldives

Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Executive Director, National Commission for Women and Children, Royal Government of Bhutan, began his presentation with a tribute to all the delegates for protecting women and for keeping the women's rights agenda alive.

Referring to the inaugural speech by Mr. Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Dr. Chopel informed the forum that for the Government of Bhutan, the Buddhist philosophy of life has provided the foundation for women's rights. Bhutan has strong traditions that support women's rights and these traditions find them in a strong position within the family as well as in society.



From its First Five-Year Plan in 1961, Bhutan has invested in people and in the social sector. Bhutan's development philosophy is strongly rooted in the concept of 'gross national happiness', measured in definitive terms of improvement in the happiness and well-being of people rather than mere growth of GNP. The four major areas for development have been identified as economic growth and development, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, preservation and sustainable use of the environment and good governance.

Health and education standards have improved tremendously in Bhutan and, likewise, women's health and welfare have come along with it. In 2002, there were thirty (30) hospitals (including 1 indigenous hospital), 166 Basic Health Units, 455 Outreach Clinics and 20 indigenous treatment centres reaching more than 90% of the country's population. Child immunization coverage is about 90% and iodine deficiency disorders have been eliminated.

About 42.1% of Bhutan's population is under 15 years. Education is free. The gross primary enrolment rate is estimated at 84.2%. Of those who enroll, 69.3% complete primary education and 39% reach Class X. In 2004, there were a total number of 155,234 students (approximately 50% women), trainees and learners

enrolled in 433 schools, 14 institutions and 455 Non-Formal Education centres facilitated by 5,216 teachers, trainers and instructors. Female enrolment is higher than males in the capital city Thimphu. Girls constitute 30% of the total enrolment in institutes of technical education.

The Royal Government of Bhutan has ratified the CEDAW and CRC without any reservations, signifying its deep commitment. Accordingly, Bhutan has engaged in a process of harmonisation of its legal systems and penal codes in line with its international commitments. National mechanisms have been put in place. The National Commission for Women and Children is an independent autonomous body reporting directly to the three arms of the government, e.g. to the Prime Minister, to the Chief Justice and to the Speaker of the National Assembly. Bhutan has overcome its initial hesitation in reporting to the CRC and CEDAW committees and, by now, has completed six reports for CEDAW and, likewise, completed the CRC report, while the national report is due this year. The process of reporting to Treaty Bodies (CRC and CEDAW) has led to an increased confidence.

In the last few years, there has been a growing appreciation of gender and human rights issues. In the last two years, workshops and seminars on human rights, CEDAW and CRC have been organised by the National Commission for Women and Children in collaboration with donor partners. Bhutan is trying to link gender and human rights to the on-going development process in the country. Currently, the draft Constitution of Bhutan, which includes a chapter on fundamental rights, is being reviewed and debated by the public.

Bhutan is divided into three regions: East, West and Central and has 38 districts. In the Eastern region, all government officials have been trained as gender has been mainstreamed in all planning and monitoring activities. During 2005 to 2006, with the help of UNICEF and UNDP, Bhutan will plan and implement according to the rights-based approach. More importantly, the Government will be involved in developing a gender master plan, based on the comments received from the CEDAW committee, the Poverty Study of 2004 and the MDG Progress Report. Other initiatives taken in 2005 include research on women and children and Bhutan's second Human Development Report (which is in a final draft stage).

In recent years, a number of laws have been passed that address violence against women. Bhutan's Penal Code 2004 covers violence against women, though attempts to define domestic violence have not been successful. Currently, there are a number of laws that protect women's rights such as inheritance rights, land rights (over 60% of rural and 45% of urban women hold property titles), marriage rights, and the Rape Act. Bhutan is also in the process of negotiating with the UN,



NGOs and the National Commission to conduct a baseline study on violence against women.

The Government stated that the National Commission for Women and Children had a mandate to receive, monitor and investigate violation of rights and a Bhutan-specific strategy is planned based on regional experiences and mechanisms currently being reviewed. This research will be carried out by the National Commission for Women and Children and its local chapters, which will also be involved in the investigation and monitoring of rights violations.

A number of new organisations are now taking up the issue of violence against women. For example, RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women) set up under the auspices of Her Highness, the Queen, aims to support marginalized women and focuses on addressing violence against women. Another new initiative launched by the Government is a permanent Women's Consultative Group called SAWAK, which will focus on issues of violence against women in Bhutan. A National Children's and Women's Assembly is also planned for 2005, which will take on board some of the recommendations of the Islamabad Conference. A consultation with parliamentarians and governors will be organized in July 2005 to focus on the rights of women and violence against women.

Bhutan ratified the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children in 2003. The Bhutan Penal Code has clear provisions on both inter- and intra-country trafficking. The national consultation held in 2004 had recommended to the National Commission to conduct a study on the status, nature and extent of trafficking in Bhutan. The Government is cognisant and concerned about the reports of violence of Bhutanese women who have been trafficked. There is also concern that the young girls and boys reported 'missing' may actually have been trafficked.

The Government of Bhutan recognises HIV/AIDS as one of the biggest challenges to Bhutan's development. There is strong political commitment to address the same. In 2005, the King issued a decree on HIV and AIDS and, Her Majesty, the Queen, who is also UNIFEM's Goodwill Ambassador, is spearheading the advocacy and awareness campaign. In addition, there are about twenty fully functional, multi-sector task forces in all the armed forces cantonments, voluntary groups of servicemen's wives who are involved in advocacy which includes family planning and condom distribution among the families of armed forces. There are also STDs/HIV outreach programmes for commercial sex workers in towns and townships. The commitment to the HIV/AIDS issue is also seen from the fact that the government has signed a \$5 million project with the World Bank.

To support women's political participation, Bhutan has recently launched a gender mainstreaming and leadership training of female community workers in the eastern part of the country. The government believed that women's participation is inadequate, inhibited partly by cultural norms and, it recognises the importance of encouraging women to take on decision-making roles.

Concluding with a quote from an old Buddhist proverb, 'Even if you are uncertain of where you are going from here on, take pride in the many mountains and valleys you have traversed so far to reach this point', Mr. Chopel expressed his Government's pride in engendering policies which is an important milestone, as Bhutan started late but has caught up with the other South Asian countries.

## Response from Civil Society

Dasho Dawa Dem, Secretary, Women's Association for Bhutan, mentioned that until last year, Bhutan had only one women's organization, e.g. the National Women's Association which was formed by a resolution passed by the National Assembly in 1980. There are a few other NGOs now like RENEW which are trying to uplift the socio-economic status of the women in Bhutan. Further, the National Commission for Women and Children was also formed only one year ago and, while the process of gender mainstreaming within institutions has begun, there are areas where there is room for improvement. Specifically, the following areas require attention:

- There should be more cooperation between the NGOs and the government, as without the support of the government, NGOs cannot go far.
- Although, in Bhutan, the laws, e.g. the marriage act, property and inheritance law and other legislations, have put women at par with men, there is a need to encourage women to be involved in decision-making, both in the local and national government.
- More than numbers, the country needs active NGOs working at the grassroots level, for which capacity-building and financial resources are required.

A discussion ensued and it was noted that Bhutan was a matriarchal society, that has not necessarily had focussed programmes for women. Men rely on their sisters to support them if they are unemployed and the burden of maintaining property and livelihoods falls on women. Similarly, while there is no formal gender bias, it does not follow that there is gender sensitivity or an understanding of gender concepts and gender-sensitive planning, etc. Hence, gender mainstreaming continues to be on the agenda of the government and civil society.

The Inheritance Act, 2002 has given equal rights to men and women but, inheritance by men is not socially acceptable so very few men exercise this right. It is also believed by some that this places a burden on women and bars them from participation in education (literacy rates are low), government and politics, etc. It appears then that positive cultural traditions and customary practices did not necessarily lead to an enhanced quality of life for women.

The discussion also noted that Bhutan has a relatively high levels of social sector investment, e.g. health and education account for 22% of GDP. It was suggested that investments in health infrastructure and communications needs to be enhanced to meet the challenge in terms of providing services to remote and scattered communities, especially related to women's health.

In response to the participants' questions about the effects of globalisation on women's lives in Bhutan, the Government informed the forum that Bhutan has only recently signed a number of treaties and was on the road to becoming a member of the World Trade Organisation. However, looking at the monetary economy and how global capital is organised, Bhutan has concerns on the repercussions on communities of consequent societal shifts. For example, extended families being replaced by smaller nuclear families and single working parents. These issues brought with them an added dimension of vulnerability and risk. The Government is still studying the ramifications of globalisation on Bhutan's economic and social structures.

Chaired by Dr. Rinchen Chopel  
Executive Director  
National Commission for Women and Children,  
Department of Health  
Royal Government of Bhutan

H.E. Ms. Kanti Singh, Minister of State, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, appreciated the excellent opportunity that the Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference - 'Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten' provided for sharing experiences in gender mainstreaming and achieving the goals outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Minister noted that the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) was a landmark event that set the pace for women's empowerment. The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), pegged on the pillars of human rights and gender equality, was accepted by India without reservation. The ten-year eventful journey since Beijing has been marked with shared learning, partnerships, achievements and advancement for women in different spheres.

The Minister was pleased to share that India had taken measures to address the problems confronting women. One example being that as early as 1993, one third of elected seats in the rural and urban local bodies were reserved for women. The reservation of one-third seats in local government institutions has resulted in over a million women participating actively at the grassroot political processes. Leadership training and capacity-building of the elected women representatives was taken up at a massive scale and their increased networking has transformed them into effective and efficient leaders in their community. The Government has initiated gender-mainstreaming measures at the Union and State levels to ensure that gender concerns are brought to the centrestage in all aspects of public expenditure and policy. A bill for the reservation of one-third seats in state and national legislatures is ready and consensus is being built before it is presented in parliament.

The Government, through its Common Minimum Programme, has endeavoured to ensure elimination of

gender discrimination and economic empowerment of women through equal rights of ownership such as lands, shelter, etc. The government has guaranteed at least a hundred days of work to one person per family in rural areas to provide employment. One of the thrust areas identified by the Prime Minister for development of women is legal equality for women in all enactments.

Recognising the role of education in the empowerment of women, concrete steps have been taken to reduce the gender gap in enrolment, to increase retention at the school level and to increase participation of women in higher and technical education. Among the significant achievements of the decade has been the decline in the absolute number of females who are not literate.

India has effectively put in place the largest micro-finance programme in the world. Women in remote villages are coming together to form self-help groups (SHGs) to access credit and start income generation ventures. Federation of SHGs have emerged at the state and regional levels. To improve women's access to land, surplus state land is redistributed to the SHGs and registration of women as joint owners of land is encouraged.

In the context of the adverse effects of liberalisation and globalisation on women, a gender perspective is being integrated into macro-economic policies. The focus is on infrastructure, capacity-building, and enterprise development skills of women as that would benefit them both as workers and entrepreneurs. Interventions to prevent exploitation and casualisation of labour have been adopted like fixation of minimum contractual wages and various social security measures which have already led to beneficial outcomes on income and working conditions for women. Further, supportive steps are necessary to enable women to overcome the restrictions and challenges they face, while at the same time enabling them to explore trade gains that may accrue in hitherto unexplored sectors.

The identification of areas of concern has implications for the mechanisms and institutions through which programme interventions are expected to translate into desirable outcomes. Several innovations in this respect have been introduced in the last few years, such as new methods of gender mainstreaming and gender-budgeting. The Tenth Plan has initiated action in tying up the concept of Women's Component Plan and gender-budgeting to develop a gender perspective in planning.

The Women's Component Plan and gender budgeting which record funds earmarked for schemes targeted to women and girls and those with a significant women's component are effective mechanisms in the planning process for targeting public expenditure in favour of women. The recent guidelines issued by the Department



of Women and Child Development have enabled other Departments and State Governments in taking up gender-budgeting exercises. In course of time, all Departments will be required to present gender budgets, as announced by the Finance Minister of India in his recent budget speech. In the area of gendered statistics, important steps have been taken to improve the database on women to institutionalise a system of data collection and to use this data in planning and advocacy for gender mainstreaming.

The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament as early as 1992 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. Several Acts are in place to protect women against violence. Efforts are on to strengthen their implementation. Some of the Acts are being amended to make the punishments more severe. Some new Bills are also on the anvil like protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplace, etc. The Supreme Court of India, through its activist role, has infused dynamism into the constitutional and legal provisions and has issued directives to the State from time to time to further safeguard and strengthen the rights of women.

A number of institutions are in place to assist women receive speedier justice such as fast track courts and Family Courts, greater recruitment of women police officers, establishment of women police cells and exclusive women police stations. There are 450 homes under the Social Welfare Board being run by NGOs that provide short stay for women in need.

The declining sex-ratio is a cause of concern that is being addressed through multi-pronged strategy of strengthening legislation and adopting measures to build public opinion through mass media campaigns.

The Constitution of India confers equal rights and opportunities on men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is one of the central concerns of the Tenth Plan (2002-2007) which spells out a three-pronged strategy for empowering women:

- Social empowerment: create an enabling environment through adopting various policies and programmes for development of women besides providing them with easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services so as to enable them to realise their full potential.
- Economic empowerment: ensure provision of training, employment and income generation activities with both forward and backward linkages with the ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self-reliant.

- Gender justice: eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and, thus, enable women to enjoy not only *de jure* but also *de facto* rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, social, civil and cultural.

India has not only integrated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) into its Tenth Plan but, also set targets in the areas covered by the MDGs which go far beyond the MDGs themselves, e.g. reduction in gender gaps in literacy and wage rates by at least 50% by 2007, reduction of Maternal Mortality Rate to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 and reduction of Infant Mortality Rate to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and to 28 by 2012. The MDGs may only have Goal 3 to specifically promote gender equality and empowerment of women, while it needs to be seen as an essential component of all the other development goals as cross-cutting theme rather than a stand-alone objective.

## Response from Civil Society

Prof. Pam Rajput, Chairperson, Asia Pacific Women's Watch, expressed her admiration for the unique mechanism of the meeting that facilitates accountability, sharing, monitoring and deliberations, etc. She recommended that the meetings focus on reporting and monitoring commitments made at the last meeting.



Prof. Rajput commended the many achievements in the area of women's rights & empowerment but, noted that the problem is with the implementation of initiatives. She observed that eighteen departments of the Government of India, will have gender-budgeting cells however, resources and technical capacity may impede realisation of the objectives of the initiatives.

She also pointed to the issue of the 'missing girl child' or what could be an issue of the 'survival of the girl child' as sex-selective abortions, child marriages, and dowry burnings still continue. The Government has internal monitoring mechanisms in place which need to be strengthened and she recommended the inclusion of NGOs in the monitoring mechanisms.

Ms. Ruth Manorama, President, National Alliance for Women, reflected on whether micro-credit packages are



the answer to poverty. She suggested that a more comprehensive framework is needed to address community issues. A shift was needed from 'women's work' to 'women's livelihoods' and how this is being addressed in countries of the region. Emphasising the importance of addressing VAW and domestic violence, she felt that violence due to caste and religion should also be addressed.

Dr. Neelam Gorhe, of Stree Adhar Kendra, agreed with the Government that many positive actions and programmes have taken place. However, some of the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women still remain unfulfilled. For example, a Commissioner of Women's Rights has still not been appointed and the National Commission for Women does not have enough powers. She expressed pride in the strength of the country's democracy as irrespective of differences with the Government, one was able to share, struggle and find space for issues.

Ms. Nigar Ahmed, Executive Director, Aurat Foundation Pakistan, expressed concern at the media trend, particularly in films, of showing gender-based violence, sometimes quite explicitly.

Ms. Nimalka Fernando, Director, IMADR Asia-Sri Lanka, queried about the inter-country mechanisms to counter trafficking of women between Nepal, India and Bhutan, especially since there was a SAARC Convention in place.

Ms. Koh Miyaoi, Social Affairs Officer, Gender and Development Section, UNESCAP, queried about the roles and responsibilities of the National Commission for Women and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development

on whether there was an overlap and, who, for example, prepares and tables new bills, who prepares the CEDAW report, etc.

Ms. Reva Nayyar, Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development, responded to all the queries and clarified the position of the government. On the issue of trafficking of women, India has an open border policy with Nepal and no visas are required: women come for employment and some are trafficked for prostitution. The issues are taken up in bilateral talks, border police is involved in discussions with the Ministry and studies have also been undertaken revealing that women come into the country for multiple reasons.

She clarified that the National Commission for Women has been set up as a statutory body under an Act of Parliament to investigate cases of rights violations, commission studies and recommend strategies. It is an advisory/recommendatory body that can request the government to take action and, in case no action is taken, the government has to explain its position. Further, the NCW can send cases to the police for prosecution and so the NGOs' demand for a Commissioner on Women's Rights to prosecute violations would result in duplication.

She agreed with the comment on violence in the media even though there is a large censor board (chaired by a woman) and sensitive producers. Dr. Girija Vyas, Chairperson, NCW, informed the meeting that a media bill has been presented to parliament and the Film Industry has also agreed to develop internal rules to monitor portrayal of women and VAW.

Chaired by Dr. Rinchen Chopel  
Executive Director  
National Commission for Women and Children,  
Department of Health  
Royal Government of Bhutan



H.E. Ms. Zahiya Zareer, Minister, Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security (MGFDSS), Government of Maldives, said that since the Fourth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference to Commemorate Beijing at Paro, Bhutan in May, 2003, Maldives has concentrated on working towards gender equality and equity. The current gender and development policy broadly focuses on:

- Gender mainstreaming through a structured gender management system for effective inclusion of gender concerns in all policies, programmes and projects so as to ensure gender equality in political and socio-economic development.
- Elimination of all existing gender disparities through effective gender mainstreaming, active promotion of gender equity and equality and, where necessary, affirmative action.

The Minister said that Maldives' priorities for achieving gender equity and equality include: gender mainstreaming and sensitisation, strengthening the gender management systems through capacity-building, advocacy and marketing, increasing male participation in achieving gender equality, identifying present and emerging gender issues to eliminate discrepancies, allow for equity, establish equality and address gender-based violence.

To implement the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the Maldives government has tried to improve and lobby for some of the issues highlighted in the Bhutan Forward-Moving Strategy, 2003. With the recent transition from an empowerment and integration approach to a gender equality and mainstreaming approach, gender issues are now the responsibility of all the Ministries, government departments, NGOs and the private sector and not just the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security.

The Gender and Development Section of the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security acts as

the lead agency in advocating and mainstreaming of gender issues and promoting women in all spheres of the society. The current National Development Plan reaffirms gender mainstreaming as a priority policy and incorporates gender as a cross-cutting issue. To strengthen the Gender Management System (GMS) established in 2001, gender focal points, members from women's development committees and project staff involved in different development projects of line ministries are being sent for overseas training in gender mainstreaming and analysis.

The Minister informed the forum that a National Gender Policy has been formulated and endorsed by the Cabinet. Gender sensitisation / orientation activities continue to be organized for various government departments at all levels. Also, the first ever codified Family Law came into effect in 2001. In 2004, the Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security carried out a review of the impact of the law. The findings of the review, to be published shortly, will be used for advocacy and legal reform.

The literacy rate of Maldivian women, at over 95%, is among the highest in South Asia. There are no differences in the school enrolment rates between boys and girls at primary and secondary levels. Although there are fewer women in tertiary and vocational education, the number of women completing higher education is growing at a steady rate. There is no discrimination in the access to educational opportunities but geographical and social factors hinder the girls' attainment rates and also their ability to utilise the available facilities.

The Minister reported that the country has made considerable advances in health over the last decades which is reflected by the increase in life expectancy rates for both sexes-71 years for women and 70 for men in 2003 and decrease in maternal and infant mortality rates. Although the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has been gradually decreasing in recent years, it is still at 97 per 100,000 live births in the year 2003. The high MMR can be attributed to the difficulties in providing maternal health service and facilities due to the geographical constraints and lack of human resources. The government recognises that the health of mothers and children is a priority area and a number of measures are being implemented in the area of maternal, child and reproductive health (RH) and family planning (FP). The areas of focus include nutrition, disease control and immunization, maternal and child health, reproductive health and family planning and, food safety.

To protect and preserve the human rights of its citizens, the Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) was formed by a Presidential Decree in December, 2003. The HRCM is in accordance with the Islamic jurisprudence, the constitution of Maldives and international covenants. To

give the commission more autonomy and legal status, a bill has been submitted to the Parliament and is currently under discussion.

With regard to violence and women, the government mentioned that a qualitative study on the incidence of violence and the Maldivian societies, attitudes and cultural practices has been conducted in 2004 and its preliminary findings have been disseminated to stakeholders. The main focus of the Ministry at present is to establish a multi-sectoral support system to address gender-based violence and assist the victims of violence based on an action plan that was drawn up in consultation with medical doctors, judicial personnel, NGOs, community activists and the staff of MGFDS. As per the Action Plan, social workers (male and female) were trained at the community-level to assist victims of violence. Consultations and sensitisation trainings were conducted with health sector personnel in 2004, to establish a mechanism of treatment and referral for victims of violence. Nurses from the main teaching hospital in the capital and twelve regional hospitals were trained in 2004 to provide initial counselling sessions for victims being treated at the hospital. Consultation and sensitisation workshops have been carried out with health and legal personnel as well as the police and women development committees. In addition, the Government mentioned that the Attorney General's Office, with the help of international consultants, is reviewing the current legislation from a gender perspective. It is also reviewing and recasting the criminal justice and juvenile justice system.

The Government of Maldives had ratified CEDAW in 1993. A multi-sector action plan has been formulated in order to incorporate the principles of CEDAW in all the government sectors. The government is currently studying its laws in relation to CEDAW and other relevant standards. The combined second and third CEDAW report has been prepared. The government was pleased to announce that MGFDS is seeking to broaden its commitment to CEDAW by acceding to the Optional Protocol Convention which will reinforce the rights of women in the domestic sphere as set forth in CEDAW.

The Minister reported further that the number of women at the professional and decision-making levels has been slowly increasing, due to the increase in girls completing tertiary and technical education. Women from three atolls successfully participated in the leadership training course specifically designed for decision-makers at the island-level. Although the number of women in decision-making is still low, the fact that women are being appointed as atoll chief, island chiefs and heads of economic institutions shows that there is a greater acceptance of women assuming posts which were traditionally ascribed only to men.

To sensitise the media, from 2003, a series of gender sensitisation workshops have been held each year for media personnel from television, radio, print media, filmmakers, actors, actresses and others from the performing arts to advocate on gender issues such as violence against women, male participation and women's rights and, responsibilities in religion and law. To promote women's rights, Maldives' biannual magazine *Hiyala*, containing information on the islands and situation of women elsewhere in the world, is published and distributed to all government departments, schools, NGOs, wards and island women's development committees.

A major challenge has been the aftermath of the December, 2004 tsunami that displaced thousands of people with thirteen islands having to be evacuated. The tsunami destroyed infrastructure and affected service delivery. Livelihoods, particularly of women, have been affected as tools and implements have been washed away. Few livelihood opportunities for women in the islands and restricted mobility means limited alternative sources of income. Misconceptions and traditional beliefs about gender equality, coupled with the geographical constraints, hamper development efforts.

The Ministry of Gender, Family Development, and Social Security does not have adequate technical capacity and resources to carry out its gender mainstreaming and advocacy mandate and needs to be strengthened.

## Response from Civil Society

Ms. Husna Razee, Executive Member, Foundation for the Advancement of Self-Help in Attaining Needs (FASHAN), congratulated the Government of Maldives for its commitment to gender equality. She noted the progress made in terms of mechanisms to empower women for gender equity, in particular, the actions taken related to gender mainstreaming, institutionalising women's development and engendering media. Ms. Razee observed that the most significant intervention has been in the area of violence against women. Even as recent as two years ago, this was an area that was shrouded in a 'culture of silence'. However, violence against women has now been officially recognised as a problem. It is being addressed in the public media and a survey has been implemented to assess the situation. This is a major step as acknowledging a problem is the first step to addressing the problem and successfully resolving it.

While commending the progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, Ms. Razee pointed out a few areas where there is a need for concerted efforts if Maldives is to successfully meet the commitments of the BPFA. These are:

## Political Participation

While there has been some progress in the area of political empowerment of women, only two of the eighteen cabinet Ministers are women, holding portfolios which are traditionally considered as women's domains (health and gender). The government needs to introduce affirmative action, especially for representation in the parliament, to ensure more equal representation of women in politics, otherwise, she feared it would take a long time for women's development. At the same time, there is a need to provide support, in terms of information and resources that enable women to be politically active and not silent participants. Support should also include skills required for advocating for gender equality

and effective representation of women's needs in political fora.

## Research

Ms. Razee also suggested research to assess the effectiveness of strategies and mechanisms that are in place in the Maldives, as the country report is not clear as to how effective these strategies are in terms of achieving gender equality. Research, especially in relation to engendering media, empowerment of women, institutionalising women's development and the impact of all gender sensitisation activities to assess the effectiveness of measures that are in place is critical to achieving the goals.



Chaired by Dr. Rinchen Chopel  
Executive Director  
National Commission for Women and Children,  
Department of Health  
Royal Government of Bhutan

H.E. Ms. Durga Shreshta, Minister, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, Government of Nepal, expressed her appreciation of the efforts of UNIFEM South Asia region in organising this forum for promoting regular interaction between the South Asian countries for the successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. On behalf of the delegation of Nepal, she also thanked the Government of Pakistan for hosting the meeting and took the opportunity to reiterate Nepal's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

The Minister stated that poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of adequate maternity and reproductive health services, trafficking in women and girls and HIV/ AIDS has crippled the living conditions of millions of women and children, particularly in the developing countries. These problems are more acute in the conflict-ridden countries, where women and children are the ones most affected by conflict, violence and anarchy.



Nepal is a signatory to the CEDAW and CRC, and submits regular periodic reports to the various committees. Nepal also played a key role in preparing the SAARC Convention Against Human Trafficking and is active in the regional and international fora for promoting gender equality.

At the national level, the meeting was informed that Nepal is guided by the internal situation of gender disparity including social, economic and legal discrimination against women. Gender equality has been a policy priority and one of the instruments for alleviating poverty, especially among women, and a multi-pronged approach has been adopted in this regard, which includes affirmative action, legal instruments and a National Plan of Action. The NPA adopted in 1997 and updated in 2004 is under implementation and addresses the twelve key areas

of concern. There is a national action plan against trafficking of women and girls for sexual and labour exploitation and an action plan for CEDAW. A ten-year national plan has just been formulated for the protection of child rights. Several institutional mechanisms have been set in place by His Majesty's Government for the overall advancement of women. These include the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, the National Coordination Committee and the National Women's Commission.

The government programmes and plans focus on livelihood, health, education, minimising the effects of conflict within the society and creation of an enabling environment to replicate and expand its best practices. The government is guided in its programmes by the BPFA and the MDGs.

The Minister mentioned that Nepal's 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan's primary goal is poverty alleviation. This plan aims to reduce poverty and the whole document is gender-sensitive. The document, for the first time in the history of Nepal, is using the Gender Development Index (GDI) as one of the indicators of poverty alleviation. The 10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan has a three-pronged approach to mainstream women.

In 2002, the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare was renamed to include children. The Ministry has the mandate to formulate policy and action plans, including coordination and monitoring of all the concerned sectoral programmes/agencies.

The Minister mentioned that the government has gender focal points (in all the government agencies) which act as an implementation arm of the Ministry. The Ministry, currently, has a Department of Women's Development, which runs a women's development programme through its field office in all seventy-five districts of the country. In addition, various committees have been formed at various levels from national to village levels, for example: the National Coordination Committee for Women's Development, chaired by the Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare, National, District and Municipality/Village Level Task Forces (against Trafficking of women and children), Central Child Welfare Board in 75 districts of the country. Recently, Gender Management Committee, which reports to the National Planning Commission, has been formed for the overall management of gender-related issues. Women and Children Cells have been established at the headquarters of Nepal's nineteen police stations, with a view of subjecting the offender to thorough police interrogation. In addition, Women's Development Offices in seventy-five districts, under the department of Women's Development, are the key gender focal points for ensuring coordination and monitoring of gender-related activities in various institutions.

The Government informed the forum that Nepal had ratified the CEDAW Convention. Presently, Nepal has prepared a gender equality draft bill which is in the process of being approved. Also, a new act to control domestic violence, sexual harassment, witchcraft and dowry systems is in the process of being formulated.

In 2001, Nepal signed the Yokohama Global Commitment to ensure the human rights of children by preventing them from being trafficked and abused. In addition, Nepal is a signatory to the SAARC Regional Convention on Combating Trafficking of Women and Children for Prostitution.

Joint Initiative Against Trafficking (JIT) is a project which is aimed at controlling trafficking of women and children. This project's activities are being carried out at the national, district and community levels and focuses on capacity-building, training, establishing and managing rehabilitation homes for trafficking survivors and, development and dissemination of IEC materials. In addition, the government is running a gender-responsive governance programme aimed to uplift the status of women.

The Minister stated that while Nepal has made significant progress in increasing female life expectancy and improving female literacy levels as well as primary and secondary completion rates, large gender gaps persist. The 11<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the Civil Code of Nepal guarantees women reproductive rights including abortion in certain circumstances. In addition, it gives equal rights of inheritance to property between son and daughter.

A comprehensive minimum standard for the care and support of children and women in need of special protection has been prepared basically aimed at safeguarding their rights. On the same lines, Citizen Charters are prepared and implemented for ensuring the service to needy women and children.

With regard to women's political participation, the Minister stated that according to the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999, there is a provision of 20% representation of women in the local bodies. Therefore, approximately 40,000 women can participate in the local body's elections.

The Ministry is imparting gender-sensitive training, seminars and workshops for women to prepare them for the final exams of the Public Service Commission. Recognizing that women's representation in the Civil service is very low, the Government has set a target of 20% women at the decision-making level through the introduction of affirmative actions. The Government has a postgraduate scholarship programme in Women's Studies for poor girl students.

The Minister especially mentioned some of the initiatives undertaken with the support of UNIFEM, including gender audit and budgeting, engendering the census process, creating a sex-disaggregated database and, advocacy programmes.

The Minister noted that the long period of conflict and acts of terrorism in the country have created security issues that have resulted in social and economic problems and that women and children were most severely affected by the armed conflict. It was observed that their rights to education, health, among others, have been affected.

The Minister concluded with the remarks that development and gender equality can only be achieved in the context of peace and, therefore, peace and security is the main national agenda.

## Response from Civil Society

Dr. Ava Shreshta, Gender Specialist (SAMANATA), Ms. Sapna Malla Pradhan, (Forum for Women, Law and Development) and Ms. Tulsa Lata Amatya (Beyond Beijing Committee) made a number of useful comments.



Nepal's 10<sup>th</sup> Plan is based on the PRSP which draws from the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and MDGs which require an engendering process. The Government of Nepal recently calculated the requirements for achieving MDGs in respect to agriculture, education, health and drinking water which revealed gaps. There are not enough resources available and it has implications for women as resources will be readjusted from programmes to meet the gaps in the targets for the MDGs.

There was also the question of ownership. The civil society participants from Nepal were of the view that the National Planning Commission and UN agencies should not be the only agencies who should own the MDG process in the country. Further, that all the ministries should not only have knowledge of what MDGs are but also on how to integrate them into the overall development planning process.

Concern was expressed at the gender dimensions of the continuing conflict, which should not only be seen as a

security issue. A decrease in the age at marriage has been noticed, as young girls were being married off to protect them from kidnappings. Parents marry them off to security forces that move into an area temporarily and when they leave, they abandon the women and the children. These children do not know who their fathers are. Parents also give away their daughters to the insurgents, in order to protect and save their son. Rape and violence against women has become an everyday occurrence. Trafficking of women and children, especially girl children, is also on the rise. The issue of citizenship of children of trafficked and abandoned women is also a concern.

There were many problems for single women and Dalit women displaced through armed conflict. The number of orphans and widows has increased, requiring rigorous interventions to address their problems. There is a need for employment opportunities and training for rehabilitation of trafficked women. Similarly, increasing violence in society is reflected in the increase in domestic violence, harassment and sexual abuse in the home and the workplace, which needs to be addressed.

Chaired by H.E. Ms. Khurshid Zahan Haque  
Minister of Women & Children's Affairs  
Government of Bangladesh

Mr. Suhail Safdar, Secretary, Ministry of Women Development, Government of Pakistan, noted that Pakistan had taken a number of actions in line with its commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. The Government had identified four priority areas for women's empowerment, e.g. political, legal, economic and social empowerment. Pakistan's National Plan of Action for the twelve critical areas of concern of the BPFA lists 184 actions, of which fifty-nine are policy-oriented actions, twenty-five are legislative actions and a hundred are finance-related. There is a National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women, which was announced in 2002. A National Commission on the Status of Women was set up in 2000.

The five-year assessment of progress against the MDGs in Pakistan shows that there has been significant progress in terms of political participation of women, while areas of concern are maternal mortality, literacy, sanitation, and access to safe drinking water. These areas have been identified by organisations and bodies working in the social sector and also by the Pakistan Development Forum who examined the overall policy and planning of the government.

Pakistan had approximately 47 million people below the poverty line. The Government recognises the different dimensions of poverty, inclusive of, but not limited to, income poverty, such as lack of opportunities for educational advancement, appropriate health facilities, poverty of opportunity in general and employment opportunities. Pakistan's Poverty Alleviation Programme is attempting to address all these various aspects of poverty. There is an extensive programme of Bait-ul-Mal worth over Rs.7 billion which provides safety nets to 1.2 million households or approximately 8 million persons, including women. The First Women's Bank, a dedicated institution created by the Government of Pakistan in 1985, provides credit to women entrepreneurs. Micro-finance is also undertaken through the Khushali Bank,

which has a presence in 64 of the 104 districts in the country. Also, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund provides funds to institutions that provide micro-finance. The government regulates all the micro-credit institutions through the State Bank of Pakistan in accordance with the Micro-Finance Ordinance.

To address rural poverty, the Government had created a special fund, e.g. National Fund for Rural Women with Rupees 100 million to support women below the poverty line. Three model projects of micro-finance initiative have been launched and the focus is to add value in the production chain through capacity-building and vocational training. For example, there is a project to support fishermen's wives in preserving and/or refrigerating the produce and, linking them to the national markets and eventually to the international export markets. Under the Jafakash Aurat Programme for rural women, three projects have been approved for disbursement of credit to groups of women without collateral.

The Government of Pakistan has launched the education sector reforms and the 'Education for All' policy. The education policies are aimed at reducing the gender gap in primary and higher education. Through legislation, compulsory primary education has been introduced in all provinces and federally-administered tribal Areas. Curriculum reforms from grades one to twelve have been undertaken. Between 1994 to 1998, female literacy grew at 38% compared to male literacy which grew at 16%. The non-formal schooling system provides basic education with more girls enrolled (75%). Free text books have been provided in the largest province, Punjab, to approximately 90% of the middle schools. The GDP allocation on education is increased to 2.7% in 2004 and, next year, the spending on education will cross 3% of the total GDP. Public-private partnership in education is encouraging and, currently, the private sector is meeting 21% of the countries' educational requirements. However, there are challenges, e.g. only 37% of primary teachers are women, 45% of primary schools are girls' schools, 70% of the girls are non-literate and, the female survival rate in grade five is just 44% and the overall survival rate is 50%.

The Secretary stated that the health indicators for women were not encouraging. The maternal mortality rate remains high at 350 women per 100,000 live births, and approximately 20,000 women die due to pregnancy-related causes each year. There are only fifteen doctors for every 10,000 population. The expenditure on health and especially reproductive health as a percentage of GNP remains low. A successful intervention has been the Lady Health Workers Programme of the Ministry of Health through which comprehensive health services are provided to women and children at the community-level. There are 80,000 Lady Health Workers at present and the





number will be raised to 100,000 by the end of 2005. The National Health Policy and the National Population Policy both have a focus on maternal and neo-natal health. The Health Policy also aims to improve primary and tertiary level care, remove the urban rural bias in services and promote public-private partnerships to achieve its goal of 'Health for All'.

The Government is working towards a zero-tolerance policy with regards to violence against women. To deal with this issue effectively, the government is working with all the stakeholders and, the committees and institutions set up to address violence against women at the national and the provincial levels. Crisis centres have been set up and more are planned. These have to be strengthened, formalised as well as linked with multiple agencies, e.g. health, police and legal agencies. Separate complaint cells have been established for women and are being introduced in all police stations. The previous experience of having dedicated women police stations did not prove to be an effective strategy. Legislation has been passed criminalising honour killings and various other discriminatory practices. Discriminatory laws are being reviewed for amendments.

The government has set up a Women's Chambers of Commerce for women entrepreneurs and the 'Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) has a special cell for providing micro-credit to women entrepreneurs. The Rural Support Programmes and the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund is trying to mainstream women into economic and social development activities. Labour force participation rates for women lag behind men but are gradually improving. Proper education and training of women is not yet a reality. Socio-cultural norms that marginalise women's productive role remain a challenge and, lack of secure mobility, childcare facilities, among others, hinder women's fuller participation in the economy. The Ministry of Women Development plans to submit a proposal for the full adoption of UN System of National Accounts.

With regard to women and decision-making, women's representation in parliament is 22% in the National Assembly and 17% in the Senate. There are seven women ministers, eighteen senators, seventy-four members of the National Assembly and one-hundred forty-one members of the provincial assemblies. One third (33%) of seats in local government are reserved for women and 36,105 women councillors were elected to the local bodies in 2000. To encourage and train women politicians, the Ministry had initiated a Women's Political Participation Programme, which has evolved as the Women's Political School in its second phase. The idea of the Women's Political School was to institutionalise women's political participation. It is a novel idea which consists of a virtual school based on the philosophy of mentoring and

nurturing. Six modules have been developed to provide training to women councillors at the local tiers of the government. The purpose is to empower women in public offices so that they can set their own agendas. Its \$4.5 million programme was launched in October last year, for a three-year period.

To encourage women's employment in the public sector, the Government has approved 10% quotas in the civil service for women over and above the open competition. There is a 5% mandatory quota for women in all recruitment across the Government. The government has proposed that in the corporate sector, there must be at least one woman on the Board of Directors.

The Government was pleased to dedicate a national machinery to the empowerment of women, the only country in the region to do so. Other portfolios concerning Children or Social Welfare are no longer combined with it. This re-organization took place in September, 2004. There is a need for strengthening the Ministry and improving the status of women. The Ministry has initiated gender reforms through a programme designed over a period of eighteen months in consultation with all the stakeholders, e.g. civil society, government, NGOs and donor agencies. Through the programme, the 'Gender Reform Action Plans' (GRAPs) will be incorporated in the governance structure of the country. The GRAPs will facilitate, in partnership with various Government departments, the design, analysis and implementation of programmes and projects with a gender perspective. In the first phase, the Government plans to have institutional structuring policy, physical reforms and capacity development initiatives. In phase II, women's political participation amendments will be made to the electoral system. For example, reform on the political participation process through amendments in the political parties' act, electoral reforms and institutional reforms, e.g. changing the very rules of business of the Government. In the first phase, the government has selected six ministries, e.g. Establishment, Information and Planning etc. to undertake the initiatives. The Election Commission and the National Commission on the Status of Women are the implementing partners.

An inter-ministerial gender mainstreaming committee, chaired by the Advisor of the Ministry of Women's Development, will meet every six months to report on the progress with regard to gender sensitisation and mainstreaming in their respective ministries and departments. A gender-budgeting initiative has been undertaken with the Ministry of Finance and Planning.

The Secretary noted that women are playing an increasingly active and prominent role in the media. All PTV (the state-run television) stations have special programmes devoted to women, their issues and concerns and, its women employees are sent regularly on deputation

to BBC and VOA to enhance their skills. A gender-sensitive code of ethics for media exists and there is, likewise, one for the advertising industry to prevent disrespectful & insensitive portrayal of women. Leading newspapers and electronic media allocate more space for women's issues and there is an increase in initiatives of women's media groups, media watchdogs, etc. However, there are challenges. The vernacular and regional press persists in insensitive portrayal of women. Advertising industry does not always adhere to the "code of ethics".

Reporting on the status of women and the environment, the Secretary disclosed that the Ministry of Environment is drafting a gender strategy on environment that requires all programmes to be gender-sensitive and ensure participation of women in all phases of environmental projects and policies. A sex-disaggregated environmental database is planned. Awareness of gender perspectives in the environment has improved and there is increased research on environmental issues, including issues on women and environment. The increase in demand for capacity-building on environment issues is a positive trend.

The National Commission on Child Welfare and Development is the national machinery for promotion and protection of the rights of the child, particularly the girl child. Education indicators show improvements, in some aspects more for the girl child than for the boy child. The Government initiated the Tawana Pakistan School feeding programme for girls in twenty-nine poorest districts of Pakistan, targeting more than half a million girls with the objective of providing nutrition and increasing enrolment.

In conclusion, the Secretary emphasised that the Government of Pakistan is fully cognisant that women's rights are human rights and is striving to ensure them.

## Response from Civil Society

Ms. Khawar Mumtaz, Shirkat Gah Collective, acknowledged the efforts of the Government since Beijing, including the recognition at an official level of the problems women face. Ms. Khawar asserted that the development of the National Plan of Action had been a collaborative exercise between the Government and civil society, reflecting civil society perspectives. She commended the Government for the initiatives taken and the ones being planned, especially the gender-budgeting and the electoral reforms. However, there are fundamental structural issues which were impeding women in all spheres of life, some inherited from the system and others are customs and practices that have been re-enforced through legal means, specifically the discriminatory legislation that has to be repealed as recommended by the National Commission on the Status of Women.



Concern was expressed at the fate of projects and initiatives that tend to collapse when the project ends. The need is to mainstream these into the planning process and to assimilate the activities into the line departments. Also, knowledge from the federal level does not always trickle down to the local level, for example, MDGs were not known at the local level.

Maria Rashid, Rozan, commended the Government for setting up crisis centres to respond to women in need and cautioned that the physical infrastructure is only the first step but, trained staff that is able to respond to the psychological needs of survivors of violence and provide rehabilitation support is crucial.

Shamim Kazmi, Association of Business, Professional and Agricultural Women (ABPAW), stated that the Women's Political School is a good concept but that men also need training, particularly with reference to creating an enabling political space for women and men.

Khalida Saleemi, SACH, appreciated the Government and NGO collaboration and, commented that both the Government and NGOs have to learn to work together to address difficult issues like protection.

Dr. Farzana Bari, Pattan, commented that violence against women is a structural issue that requires a comprehensive mechanism including legislation and the support structures. She suggested that the Government should not address it at only a functional and superficial level.

Participants wanted to know the proportion of the national budget that is allocated to the Ministry of Women Development, whether it has increased or decreased and the reasons for it. There was also concern on the delay in the appointment of a Chair for the National Commission on Women.

In the response to the issues raised, the Government agreed that structural issues needed to be addressed and stated that there is a need to strengthen all the institutions, including the Ministry of Women Development and the National Commission on the Status of Women. The delay in the nomination of the Chair was a result of the transparent, non-political process adopted by the Ministry. The Government undertook pilot projects but,

expected that the support agencies would replicate them. The Government reported that the provincial government in Punjab plans to have crisis centres for women in all its districts over the next two years, and these will become sustainable as a permanent fund has been created for it. The provincial governments, donors and philanthropic organizations will be requested to contribute to it as well.

The Secretary stated that while the Ministry required more resources, that is not the only criteria for ensuring that the gender agenda is implemented. The implementing ministries for each sector should have larger budgets for gender.

Chaired by H.E. Ms. Khurshid Zahan Haque  
Minister of Women & Children's Affairs  
Government of Bangladesh

Ms. Sita Rajapakse, Secretary, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare, Government of Sri Lanka, emphasised the commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka to the Beijing Platform for Action by referring to the National Plan of Action, aimed at coordinating and monitoring the work of the state agencies as well as evaluating their performance in terms of the Beijing Platform for Action. Sri Lanka is a signatory to most of the UN Conventions including the Optional Protocol of CEDAW.

The Secretary stated that the period under review was characterized by the growing attention paid to the promotion of women's rights, actions taken to mitigate violence against women and promote their empowerment. This has resulted in a phenomenal increase in the participation of women in education and socio-economic activities. Community-based initiatives bear testimony to the visible empowerment of women in the rural sector.

Numerous far-reaching policies and legislative changes have been introduced to ensure promotion of the rights of women. A women's rights bill has been drafted to strengthen the institutional arrangements for monitoring women's rights.

The Government stated that studies undertaken on gender-responsive budgeting have paved the way for the Government to allocate 10% of the Ministry's budgets for programmes to improve the status of women. The national budget of 2005 has made provisions to extend maternity leave benefits from the previous period of three months to nine months. Three months with full pay, three months with half pay and three months with no pay. The earlier regulation providing this facility for the first two live births has been extended to cover all live births. The new regulations also provide the continuance of payments of half salary for the widows of soldiers in the event of their remarriage.



The Secretary mentioned that important legislations have been introduced in favour of women, the most notable being the Penal Code amendments, introducing punishment for offences hitherto not included and increasing punishment for sexual offences. The Domestic Violence Bill was presented to Parliament in February 2005 and will be presented again with proposed amendments. With regard to the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, steps have been taken to establish police desks for women and children. To carry out their work effectively, the law enforcement agencies, mainly the police, the army and the judiciary have been gender-sensitised. Discrimination against women in land and property has been eliminated through amendments and citizenship laws as well as the land development ordinance.

Sri Lanka has a literacy rate of 97% for women. Girl's participation in primary and secondary education has surpassed that of the boys'. In 1998, Sri Lanka made education compulsory for ages 5-14 years, with equitable education facilities for both boys and girls. Gender parity, as given in the MDG goals, has been achieved already. Enrolment of girls in schools has increased from 49.9% in 1997 to 50% in 2001. The percentage of women students at university has increased from 44% in 1996 to 51.5% in 2002. Women's participation in arts and law courses is very high (60-70%) and very low in engineering and technical subjects (16% in 2002). There is also a tendency of more women joining secretarial and commerce courses. The gender gap in the IT field is also gradually narrowing.

An enlightened health policy providing free health services and easily accessible island-wide network of primary health care services has contributed significantly to the promotion of women's health. Gender equity is maintained in the new reproductive health policy. More emphasis was paid during this decade to awareness-raising on reproductive rights, girls working in the free trade zone and vulnerable groups. The Government also introduced 330 well-women clinics for women between thirty and sixty years and, wider coverage to control STD and AIDS.

Participation of women in the labour force has risen to 34% in 2003. Women have secured one-third of government sector jobs and nearly 50% of the jobs in the private sector. The majority of the 45,000 graduates recruited for the public service are women. In the last ten years, there has been a visible rise in women's participation in agriculture, fisheries and forestry.

Expansion of the industrial sector and employment opportunities to the Middle East and other countries in the wake of globalization has provided accelerated employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled women. Women account for 65% of the jobs in the



industrial sector as skilled and unskilled labourers. In these vocations, they are subject to unhygienic living conditions, occupational health hazards, insecurity, long hours of work, gender subordination and sexual harassment. The Ministry of Women's Affairs set up a hostel that accommodated 300 girls working in the Free Trade Zone area in 2001.

The Government stated that it enacted laws to regulate employment agencies in 1997 to safeguard the rights of migrant workers. The law stipulates that contracts entered into by migrant workers and foreign agencies should be binding by law and, embassies in the recruiting countries should register these agencies. In addition, the Sri Lankan Foreign Employment Bureau expanded its activities to oversee the welfare of migrant women by providing education to their children, pre-departure training, free insurance and appointing welfare officers in the receiving countries who would look into their problems.

With regard to the informal sector, women are engaged in self-employment activities of poverty-alleviation programmes conducted by the Ministry of Samurdhi, Ministry of Empowerment and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Skill Development. Samurdhi, the main poverty alleviation programme of the Government, was started in 1995, covering approximately 1.8 million population and provided income-transfer, compulsory saving insurance cover and credit for self-employment. The policy framework for the Government prepared in year 2000 specifies that economic growth is the main means to alleviate poverty. The policy and the programmes are gender neutral but in all these poverty alleviation programmes, women constitute 80% of the participants. These poverty alleviation programmes were a model for smaller groups at the village level and formalised access to credit and savings. The Women's Bureau has established Women's Banks for micro-credit and expanded them to nine divisions with a membership of 4,250 since 2001. The accumulated savings amount to Rs. 3 million. The State and private banks have started exclusive credit schemes for women on concessional rates or loan schemes.

With regard to women's political participation, the Secretary said that women's participation in parliament is 4%, in provincial councils 2% and only 1.7% in Pradesha Sava. As a result of lobbying since 1995 both by government institutions and civil society groups, the cabinet had approved a 33% quota, in principle, for local government institutions this year. However, culture, tradition, money and 'muscle-power' retard the upward mobility of women in power-sharing and decision-making, especially in politics. Women's representation at the highest decision-making levels is gradually improving but the gap is still sizeable, particularly in politics.

In terms of women's workforce participation, the Secretary claimed that in 1997, women consisted of 9% senior officials and managers, 10% professionals, 20.3% in the judiciary and 13% in universities. Women have penetrated the exclusive fields occupied by men such as the armed forces, though in small numbers.

Sexual and gender-based violence received the highest priority from the Government in the recent years. In addition to legal measures, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and NGOs created awareness on the issues through media campaigns, development of database, lobbying for policy changes and expansion of counselling and shelters for women. The National Committee on Women established a gender complaint centre in 1999 and the Human Rights Commission (established in 1995) also responds to gender complaints, resolved through conciliation and mediation. The National Committee on Women and the Women's Bureau conducts legal literacy and awareness programmes for the community to deal with violence at the community-level. Law enforcement officers, particularly police, and the judiciary have been sensitised through workshops in implementing the reformed laws that address violence against women. The Women's Bureau handles psychosocial problems of women in the Free Trade Zone areas through seven Counselling Centres.

Internal conflict, on-going for over 18 years now, has affected women in the form of loss of life, loss of loved ones, displacement and psychological trauma. The number of war widows is approximately 50,000 and 300,000 internally displaced persons are living in camps. About 80% of these refugees are women and children. The ceasefire agreement between the Government and LTTE took place in 2002, with a view to establishing peace in the country. A separate gender sub-committee to advise the main committee handling the peace process was appointed to help resolve gender issues.

Sri Lanka has prepared several programmes and action plans for the development and protection of the environment, which has a direct bearing on women as caretakers of the environment. Women's participation was evident in the committee of water supply, sanitation projects and clean settlement projects for the urban poor.

The Government of Sri Lanka noted that the progress in education, health and human development is quite impressive. However, socio-cultural and patriarchal norms hinder women's empowerment. The government was concerned in particular about violence against women and recognises that effective advocacy with law enforcement agencies and civil society is needed. It must also be ensured that victims are able to report violence and seek help. Illegal abortions, malnutrition in children and

pregnant or lactating mothers, lack of awareness of HIV/AIDS are health issues that require attention.

Women need more opportunities to participate in the peace-making processes. The impact of globalisation on women's livelihoods, retrenchment and protection of migrant women are challenges that need to be addressed. The Government also recognises that the care economy, the unpaid labour of women, needs to be valued and reflected in the GDP.

The tsunami devastated three-fourths of the coastal belt of the country in December, 2004, and this had serious repercussions on the lives of women who form a majority of those displaced. The Minister of Women's Empowerment and Social Welfare has obtained cabinet approval to mainstream gender in post-tsunami relief and recovery work. The Government is especially focusing on land rights, appointment of women to disaster-management committees and other decision-making roles, providing livelihood assistance, meeting health and reproductive needs, safety of women and providing psycho-social support to victims. The Government acknowledged the financial and technical support extended by UNIFEM to engender post-tsunami activities.

In conclusion, the Secretary appreciated the dynamic role of the women's NGOs in the promotion of women's rights in the country. She hoped that the deliberations on issues common to the countries and strategies for empowerment would lead to an updated National Plan of Action for the advancement of women in Sri Lanka.

## Response from Civil Society

Dr. Sepali Kottegoda, Coordinator, Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum, stated that the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been very active as is evident by the fact that it drew up the National Plan of Action immediately after the Beijing Conference and revised it in 2000 and, has made efforts to mainstream gender. She expressed concern about the implementation of the Plan of Action, which is dependent on political will, and the capacity of other ministries to absorb the Plan into their own budgetary allocations and plans. The Domestic Violence bill

(presented to parliament in early 2005) was commendable but, it was not enough, as the resistance articulated on cultural grounds by the parliamentarians raises concerns about its implementation.

Dr. Sepali Kottegoda noted that the lack of sex-disaggregated data at the national level was brought to the fore in the aftermath of the tsunami as there were no figures on how many women and men were affected or how many female-headed households were displaced during this disaster. The efforts of the department of statistics to address this issue and of integrating gender concerns in the post-tsunami activities by the Ministry of Women's Development were appreciated.

The Government has agreed, in principle, to providing 30% quota for women's representation in decision-making. Sri Lanka has very good indicators for education but there is a need to examine the quality and gender-sensitivity of the curriculum. Efforts need to be made to support the National Committee on Women to get abortion legalised especially in the case of rape, incest or congenital abnormalities.

Ms. Nimalka Fernando, Director, IMADR-Asia, stated that the on-going armed conflict was a major problem that affected development planning. Policy planners need to take this into account, particularly as women are not a homogenous group and the effect of conflict on women of different ethnicities and regions would differ. She expressed concern that Sri Lanka did not have a separate Women's Ministry and the portfolio has been attached to different ministries, e.g. Health, Social Services, etc., even the Transport Ministry. She recommended a separate Women's Ministry which would have adequate resources, among other considerations.

Ms. Feroze Begum, Mayor, Karnool Municipal Corporation, Andhra Pradesh, recommended that the Sri Lanka Government introduces a special fund for women who want to stand for elections. A case in point are the Norwegian countries who have adopted this policy and, because of which, a greater number of women have been able to stand for public office. Further, women needed to join the political arena so that they could lobby for important concerns. This was supported by a number of the participants.

## Afghanistan

Chaired by H.E. Ms. Khurshid Zahan Haque  
Minister of Women & Children's Affairs  
Government of Bangladesh

H.E. Dr. Masouda Jalal, Minister, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Government of Afghanistan, conveyed warm greetings on behalf of her Government and people, particularly the women in Afghanistan, to the governments and women of South Asia. She thanked the organisers of the meeting for the privilege and, for giving space in the meeting for Afghanistan in spite its limited experience as a young nation. The long-term war and conflict in the country had badly affected all walks of life, e.g. political life, cultural life and social life. Women



were affected the most and it was only until three years ago that they did not have any rights as human beings to live a normal life.

The Minister stated that over the past three years, women's position and participation has improved in different fields, e.g. economic, political, cultural and social. The policies and programmes of the government are gender-sensitive and inclusive of women as reflected in the Bonn Agreement, which put together the institutional framework of sustainable democratic governance and, further, in other significant documents such as the Berlin Plan of Action called 'The Way Ahead' of the government, the development budget and the new Constitution and, in all the legal frameworks of Afghanistan, women's empowerment and advancement has been taken into consideration and gender equality has been promoted.

The capacity of women over the past decade, particularly during the crisis, has been adversely affected. Even so, women have responded to the encouragement by the government and surveys reveal that women are working in governmental organisation, in different ministries and in the military. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has taken the initiative of building the capacity of women to enable them to implement gender policies. The Ministry has also established gender units in a number of the ministries to reflect gender policy in their plans, programme,

policies and strategies. She stated that the government is now establishing a gender database to support gender planning and gender monitoring in the governmental system.

The Minister mentioned that with the swearing-in of the new parliament of Afghanistan in September, efforts are being made to ensure that women also stand for public office. Currently, women are actively participating in two *loya jirgas*, e.g.. constitutional *loya jirga* and emergency *loya jirga*, for the election of the president and approval of the new Constitution of Afghanistan which will assure 25% participation of women in the parliament. There have been women candidates for the presidential elections and women ministers during the past three years in three cabinets, in the interim administration during the transitional period and in the current elected government. At the moment, Afghanistan has three elected women Ministers in the Cabinet. Other achievements are that women have rejoined the educational sector as teachers and as students and, one-third of the six million boys and girls in schools are girls.

Women are participating in forming civil foundations, in forming political parties and non-governmental organizations. Afghanistan has hundreds of NGOs being run by women as well as specific programmes focusing on women.

While Afghanistan has made significant progress in incorporating women's rights in the constitution and other documents and celebrates the achievements, there are also many challenges facing women in Afghanistan. The Minister requested women of South Asian countries to help in resolving these.

Though a number of interventions have been made, yet the condition of women in Afghanistan is still the worst in the world. Sixty percent of the girls of school-going age are outside the educational system due to lack of schools, teachers, teaching materials and lack of awareness of parents about the importance of education.

The MMR in Afghanistan is dismal, e.g. 1900 for 100,000 live childbirth and in some provinces of the country, it is 6500 for 100,000 childbirth which is the highest in the world. The Minister expressed regret that in spite of the presence of the international community inside Afghanistan, a mother dies every twenty minutes, it was like a quiet tsunami, a tragedy that women could not be provided with their fundamental rights, e.g. life through timely ante-natal care. Recent statistics show that everyday seventy mothers and seven hundred children die because of lack of reproductive health services and clinics, lack of trained reproductive health workers, materials and equipment and also because of poverty and a lack of awareness among families and women.

As in many other third world countries, poverty has a female face in Afghanistan, although, there is equality of rights for men and women in the Constitution. CEDAW has been ratified by the Government and all negative traditional practices are discouraged but, in reality, women are subjected to all kinds of violence, e.g. forced marriage, domestic violence, among others. In order to translate the values of the new Constitution of Afghanistan and address violence against women, improved security and resources are required.

The Minister invited Dr. Noeleen Heyzer and Ms. Chandni Joshi from UNIFEM to visit Afghanistan before

the parliamentary elections to observe how women, who are 90% non-literate, are ready to take part in politics.

In conclusion, the Minister called upon the seven ministers from the South Asian countries to visit Afghanistan and see the situation for themselves, to ask why mothers were losing their lives and why there wasn't any education and, to extend help and encouragement. She proposed that the seventh South Asian Regional Ministerial Conference be held in Kabul, as the next one is being hosted by Bangladesh.



## Gender, Livelihoods and Resources in South Asia

Presentation by Dr. Govind Kelkar

Chaired by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy

Dr. Kelkar's study attempts to address the following questions:

- Have the livelihoods of women changed during the last decade?
- What impact have these changes made on women's right to resources and power, well-being and gender relations?
- What strategic interventions are needed to advance women's position and transform gender inequalities?

The study is based on existing research on gender and livelihoods, a research conducted by herself and a fellow economist and drawing from policy documents including project appraisal reports of IFAD, UNIFEM, etc.

Poverty is a human condition characterised by low income, lack of voices, sustained deprivation of capabilities, choices and power that are necessary for the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. In the new concept of poverty reduction, access to livelihood resources, capabilities-building, security against vulnerability and gender equality have come to be viewed as one integral process of the national plans of macro-economic and social policies to promote growth and reduce poverty. However, there is deep dissatisfaction over poverty assessment, particularly in the PRSP, for failing to incorporate women's concerns or overlooking gender relations of inequality. Poverty must be measured against the full range of rights, standards of social equality and non-discrimination as well as obligation of the state and other development actors, including civil society organisations, community management bodies and corporations. Measures like GDI (Gender Development Index) and GEM (Gender-Related Empowerment Measures) have not been able to capture the position gained by women in accessing livelihoods. The adoption of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSPs) approach and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has led to an increased need for systematic analysis of poverty and its linkage with gender inequality.

South Asia is not homogenous and there are variation in inequalities and in culture and tradition, as well. For example, even in Bhutan's matrilineal systems, women were excluded from the decision-making due to tradition and customs. Despite numerous cases of success in managing the village-level governance and micro-finance or self-help groups (SHGs), rural women of

South Asia have significantly less access than men to livelihood resources, assets, health care, education, technology and community management. The most extreme form of gender inequality is the fact that



over 79 million women are "missing" in South Asia, largely due to familial neglect of girls, sex-selective abortions, social practices like dowry, property-related murders, 'honour killings', acid throwing and trafficking in women and girls (Human Development in South Asia, 2000).

Dr Kelkar observed that disparities between women and men in their access to and control over resources are associated with women's systematically lower access to community governance, health and education facilities and less than optimal participation in economic decision-making.

Dr Kelkar assessed changes in livelihoods through the following:

**Gender Division in the Workforce:** Women's economic activity rate in most countries of South Asia did not show much improvement, although, none of them regressed in women's economic activity rates. There is a marked improvement in Pakistan which, however, started on a much lower level of women's economic activity and this remains at 44 percent, the lowest of all South Asian countries in comparison to men's economic activity rate. The highest comparative levels are attained in Bangladesh and the Maldives, with 76 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. What this shows is that: 1) progress in most of South Asia has been very slow or has only kept up with increases in the labour force; 2) There is a long way to go to match the performance in South East Asia where there is a movement in the direction of women becoming income earners and salary workers and account workers, and not just the contributing family workers.

The country that has made economic progress is Bangladesh, which has developed a large-scale garment industry. The rest of South Asia, India and Pakistan, in particular, have failed to develop labour-intensive export sectors like Bangladesh.

**The Information Technology (IT) Workers:** Dr. Kelkar also looked at another area of change in women's livelihood, e.g. information technology. But, how could one assess women's livelihood in the IT Sector? According to the data from the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), an apex body, women consist of 21% of the total IT workforce in India. This is higher than their participation in the national economy as a whole. In a recent study undertaken for

UNDP (2004), of nine Asian countries (China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), the authors noted that despite the absence of gender-disaggregated data at national levels, the role of IT industry in promoting gender equality was positive.

The key question was, what has changed for women working in the IT industry? Has structural inequality in gender relations changed and have roles been redefined? A brief example: Women only work largely in the call centres. This has led to greater mobility and their say in household matters has increased. As more and more young women commute to work in the call centres, often late at night, Delhi has become relatively safer at night. However, women still continue to be primarily responsible for reproductive work, which also limits their professional mobility.

At the same time, women's groups in various parts of Asia are able to keep in touch with each other and with groups in other parts of the world through email and other such communications system. IT constitutes the basis of the redefinition of traditional gender norms. Nevertheless, they function within the dominant interests of the market and the state. This provides a non-threatening mobilisation of women's labour for the benefit of their families and communities.

**Informal Work:** Women's entry into the workforce in South Asia has largely been in the informal economy, with an estimated 70-90% of women engaged in a variety of informal work. This has tremendously increased from 44% to 75% in Bangladesh, as well as in India and Nepal where a high proportion of informal workers were found in trade, hotels and restaurants and followed by manufacturing. According to 1991 figures for Nepal, of the majority of informal workers, 83.7% women and 69.5 % men were self-employed. A study of Pakistan reported that approximately 100,000 women worked in brick kilns, but were not officially employed because, although the entire families worked, only the men were registered as the head of the households.

The UNIFEM-SEWA workshop organized in New Delhi in December, 2002, noted three distinct outcomes of the current economic reforms and associated deregulation process, viz: the growth of the informal sector; greater feminisation of labour market with widening gender wage differentials; and, the re-emergence of home-based work as an important constituent of industrial production. It is thus important for policy makers to focus on the informal economy.

**Agricultural workers:** In South Asia, approximately 3% to 10% of rural women own land which they cultivate, while in matrilineal societies like Bhutan and Maldives, women own a higher proportion of the land. In Sri Lanka,

25% of women own the land whereas in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, women's ownership of land is very low. The exclusion of women from the allocation of intra-household resources limits their power of control over land-based livelihoods. This is further reinforced by: 1) socio-cultural perceptions of physical and biological constraints on women's work; and 2) patriarchal property ownership practices where land/ property is inherited from father to son (or another close male relative in the absence of son) in most of South Asia, with exceptions in Bhutan and partly in Maldives.

There is also the issue of the increasing feminisation of agriculture workers, while most cultivators are men working their own fields. In terms of wage disparity between men and women, there is no change, with the exception of Bangladesh where there is substantial change in rural women's wages in proportion to men's wages rising from 48% in 1984-1985 to 70% in the year 2002. The two important factors that have contributed to this change in agricultural wage are the micro-financing institutions and savings groups in the countryside of Bangladesh leading to an increase in economic activity and, secondly, the expansion of the garment industry where rural women come to work and get a better wage. Micro-finance has become a source of capital for women to acquire access to land (the case of Bangladesh). In India, the Deccan Development Society (DDS) has deliberately used savings and credit to enable groups of women to take land on lease. In the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, the government agencies like the Integrated Tribal Development Authority and Scheduled Caste Development Corporation have purchased land from owners wishing to lease the land and have transferred it, free of any charge, to the landless. All such land can only be transferred in the names of women. Instead of waiting for a state-enforced land reform, women are making use of access to capital and the market system to acquire land.

Dr. Kelkar referred to the phenomenon of farmers' suicides which reveals that farmers have to understand market mechanisms and also adopt multiple-cropping and other ways of minimising or reducing risk. The government should also introduce financial, insurance and safety net measures as it promotes the commercialisation of agriculture.

**Forest-based Livelihoods:** There is some evidence that in forest-based (patrilineal) communities, because of their involvement in gathering from forests and their marginal dependence on agricultural produce, women are economically more independent and have a higher status than their counterparts have in the rest of India. Leasehold forestry was initially tried out through the Royal Government of Nepal - IFAD project. Seeing its success in improving the livelihoods of poor women and in

increasing tree cover, leasehold forestry has been extended all over Nepal. There are also examples of Community Forest Management in India where women have played an active role in initiating forest protection and several cases where women's committees (Mahila Samitis) are managing forests.

**Migrant Workers:** The importance of migration can be seen in the poverty reduction role of remittances by migrant workers. It is the largest or second-largest source of foreign exchange in a number of South Asian countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In Asia, as a whole, there has been an increasing feminisation of migration, with women constituting 1.5 million or more than 16 percent of total Asian migrant workers in 2000. Of the total migrants, it is also estimated that 30 to 40 percent are 'irregular' migrants, who have no legal status and, consequently, no protection of their rights. Migration then has clearly emerged as a livelihood option.

In addition to migration for meeting the household's basic needs for food, shelter and economic security, the needs or motivations for women to migrate include (1) "elements of society that limit a woman's personal development, marriage with dowry, etc."; and (2) "escape from stigmatisation/violence – incest, rape, former sex worker, divorced, widowed, etc." (IOM, 2003).

**Tourism and Livelihoods:** Studies that have followed the growth of tourism industry have focused upon the motivations of tourists. Relatively, little attention has been paid to human institutions and understanding of gender relations in the communities that receive tourists. For women of the receiving communities, economics of tourism is seen in sex tourism that is an emerging phenomenon in South Asia. It is, however, only one of the many roles women play in the tourism industry. In China, for example, women have the function of hosts, tourist workers, house-keepers, boat rowers, craft and snack vendors, small entrepreneurs and managers of cottages, guest houses, night clubs, etc. The tourism industry has provided various 'decent' livelihood opportunities for women, 'decent' in terms of dignity and security in the workplace, as stated in an ILO study.

**Micro-Finance and Local Markets:** There are different debates about micro-finance: whether this puts the poor rural women in debt or whether it increases their economic agency. Micro-finance in India covers over 11.6 million poor households accessing banking services through their 77 million self-help groups. There is a close link between banks and a self-help group as saving does create capital accumulation– not only for individual women but, also, for the society. A very good example is the revival of the sick banks due to women paying back their loans. Bangladesh women talk about how earning money gives them 'weight' within the household, and for rural women

in Bangladesh, respect or *samman* no longer depends on being in seclusion (*purdah*) but attaches to being an income earner, working outside the home and being able to travel on their own.

**Conclusion:** The changing patterns of livelihoods, whether as wage workers or own account producers, provides a role for women as income-earners, one which is different from their former and traditional status as dependent family workers. There is the increase in dignity that goes along with being a wage earner, often even the major income provider in the family, and often with greater bargaining power. Policy-makers need to improve women workers' conditions in globalised market, in both the informal and the formal sectors.

The study recommended:

- The provision of childcare, lighting, garbage disposal, sanitary conditions and health care as well as the provision of maternity leave, in the formal and the informal sectors, state commitments to a basic package of services such as child care facilities, primary education and health care.
- Marketing facilities: Ensuring women's participation in markets by promoting women's enterprises, whether as retail providers or as centres for processing and other value-addition, tea and garment tailoring shops, etc and by giving them a voice in market management to ensure their continued access to market spaces.
- Education, along with capital and land, is one of the key resources for improving livelihoods.
- Promoting women's control over their incomes and resources would help boost growth and development
- Interventions are needed at both sending and receiving country levels for reducing vulnerability and ensuring the right to safe migration of women.
- There is a need to develop strategies to prevent violence against women which makes them most vulnerable.
- Building and strengthening grassroots institutions and using participatory approaches for enhancing women's participation in the village institutions / decision-making processes in the community and redefining gender roles by addressing structural factors that influence women's position of inferiority.

## Discussion

The paper was highly appreciated by all the participants. Ms. Khawar Mumtaz pointed out that the study on poverty in Pakistan found that women earn the most in the informal sector partly because, with globalisation, certain types of production have gone down to the village level. Moreover,

it is the volume of earning that makes an impact on women's social status and confidence, specifically, according to the research, the critical factors which influenced women's social status was based on how much she earned with reference to the household needs and other peoples' earnings. Thus, discriminatory wage differentials need to be addressed.

Ms. Salma Khan referred to the phenomena of migration as an option for livelihood. For example, it has been noted that even though Sri Lanka has excellent indicators for women, educated women are still leaving the country to do menial jobs in other countries.

Dr. Shalini Bharat felt that the informalisation of women's work in the context of globalisation cannot be assessed as a 'forward movement'. It is characterized by women taking up low paid work, without health or other cover, vulnerable to sexual exploitation, etc. Similarly, in terms of increase in household income, there is a lot of social science literature in South Asia to show that it really hasn't changed women's authority significantly, partly because men are not giving them the right but women are also not taking over such decision-making roles for themselves. Neither has there been a shift in gender division of labour and roles. All this is related somewhere to the gender norms and the kind of attitudes we still continue to have towards each other and, men and women continue to have towards women's work.

Prof. Pam Rajput averred to the fact that in the era of globalisation, market forces control livelihood options more than ever. A recent ban in one of the Indian states on women dancers in bars has led to a dilemma: should there be freedom or should the state intervene (which is equated with moral policing). For the women, it is a question of livelihood but, is this 'decent livelihood' with dignity and security? Or, should there be alternative livelihoods for these women?

Mr. S.K Nath noted that workforce participation was higher for women in the informal sector as more women are abandoned by husbands and have to earn their livelihoods. Imposing any minimum wages or other labour standards may lead to their being unemployed, possibly pushing them into 'indecent' work or suicide. He also cautioned that studies and data collection system has to be streamlined so that comparisons or extrapolations are not misleading.

Dr. Sepali Kottegoda clarified that the majority of women migrants from Sri Lanka were educated only up to Grade V or so and, for them, migration is a livelihood option. To address exploitation and the issue of 'decent' work, bilateral agreements with receiving countries is an important challenge.

Ms. Nigar Ahmad expressed concern that women in the informal sector are also affected by competition as borders

open up for goods, not people, and women are being pushed from skilled work to the unskilled, filling match boxes. Similarly, in agriculture there used to be some level of food security but, now, there is a move to corporatise agriculture and, access to commons for livestock or for water or fuel for small farmers or tenants is going to be reduced as more and more land is enclosed for corporatisation. The governments need to realise what is going to happen to these two major sectors employing women, as more people are pushed below the poverty line. The fact that 30% of Pakistan's population is below the poverty line and cannot get the minimum calorie intake is the biggest violence.

Dr. Ava Darshan noted that the Government of Nepal has set the minimum wage in the agriculture sector and the informal sector but, it is not implemented in the rural communities. She also noted that access to credit does not lead to control by women or decreased violence and, finally, how can sexual harassment be reduced in the 'formalised' informal sector. She questioned whether economic empowerment is the only way forward.

Dr. Kelkar clarified some of the issues raised by the participants. On migration as a livelihood option, she noted that there is a need to improve the working conditions at home, women will not migrate if conditions are better. Sri Lanka and India are the only two countries that allow women to migrate. In Nepal, women are struggling for citizenship rights. Bangladesh and Pakistan have illegal migration. The point to note is that steps to regulate exploitation of migrant women should not result in curtailment of women's fundamental right to mobility.

Dr. Kelkar conceded that there are exploitative conditions in micro-credit. Micro-finance organisations have become big corporations, on what is not their money; essentially, it is really the women's contribution to economic development. Women have also complained that interest rates are too high.

The World Bank did a study and found that a large number of women decide about their own earnings among the garment workers. If they are not employed in the factory they can't get micro-credit; if they do not earn, they are liable to suffer violence at home. Report after report shows incest, beatings, honour killings, acid throwing and dowry murders. There is a need to address this and critique this type of culture. A lot of the agencies are involved in poverty reduction but women's own collective agency needs to be developed.

With regard to women working in bars, if they are not exploited and they are 'decent' entertainers, then there is no problem. But, they are exploited and, the fact is that, the same dances are also in the movies. Yet, the bottomline is that, if it is close to sex tourism and women are seen as commodities, then it is not decent work –



the provision of decent work is the solution. The definition of decent work is not from a moral perspective but in terms of dignity, minimum wages and standards it provides.

Some women are not willing to exercise their decision-making and economic rights. Perhaps, the difference comes with access or control over resources: these are the knowledge resources and the economic resources. Economic empowerment is a fundamental issue, it is not the only solution to improving women's status. However,

you cannot be dependent and also demand gender equality; independent access to resources is an important aspect.

On the impact of globalisation, we know that the informal sector has been increasing and pockets of pauperisation and wage disparity have deepened. Discriminatory, exploitative cultural conditions before globalisation have to be addressed, as not all problems have started with globalisation.



## The Varied Contours of Violence against Women in South Asia

Presentation by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy

Chaired by Ms. Salma Khan  
CEDAW Committee Member

Dr. Coomaraswamy referred to the comments of the Prime Minister of Pakistan at the Inaugural Session and what other speakers have pointed out that there are many things South Asians could be proud of. South Asia has some of the most ancient civilizations in the world that predate the West by centuries, India being the oldest. It is also the largest democracy in the world and the most long-lasting democracy in Asia. But, it is also true that in other areas, we need to turn the search light inwards. Asia, in general, and South Asia, in particular, has been classified according to UNICEF as the worst region with regards to the indicators on violence against women (VAW). The incidence of violence against women in the region is the highest in the world.

In addition to the common problems of violence against women, South Asia has particular cultural and religious practices that also accentuate the problem of VAW in the region. The general low status of women in the region and the entrenched nature of discriminatory structures have led to what is seen as a lifecycle of VAW. Even before birth, women suffer from sex-selective abortion, at infancy they may face female infanticide, as young children they will have to put up with incest and son-preference, as adolescents they may be sexually-abused or trafficked, as young women they may suffer rape, sexual harassment, acid attacks, as wives they may experience domestic violence, dowry-related violence, marital rape or honour killings, as widows they may be required to self-immolate or be deprived of property and dignity. The vulnerability to violence at every stage of the life cycle makes VAW a terrible South Asian legacy that requires concerted regional, national and local-level action.

Armed conflict, whether it is in Nepal, the Afghan border, the North East of India or Kashmir, affects women in several ways. Firstly, there is the direct violence which women suffer, e.g. sexual violence and murder, especially when the armies target the other side for punitive action. Rape during wartime is one of the oldest war crimes and is now clearly prohibited by the Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>1</sup> However, none of the countries of South Asia have become parties to the ICC. There have also been some prosecutions for custodial violence in South Asia.

Women are affected in war times as refugees and as internally-displaced persons (IDPs). Eighty per cent of the world's refugees and IDPs are women, who suffer social and economic deprivation of rights, e.g.

education, health and, food in the camps and homes that they live in. It was noted that there is a higher incidence of harassment and sexual violence in these camps. Women and children in these camps continue to have psycho-social problems and long-term adjustment problems. When the armed conflict is over, resettlement is an even longer process; their lands and homes are occupied or destroyed.



Several studies have shown that women suffer as war widows and, mostly, have to bring up their children on their own while experiencing bureaucratic harassment, sexual harassment and social stigma. Women are affected by the fact that in areas of armed conflict, there are always armed camps with young men and, therefore, trafficking emerges.

The U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 requires that women be actively involved in the peace process, be negotiators but, in Sri Lanka, all the main negotiators are men. Due to pressure from civil society, a gender committee was set up to deal with this issue.

Trafficking is another kind of violence that most of the countries in South Asia want to prevent by having strong laws and punishment. But, trafficking and sex work as a livelihood option is also a reality of South Asia. For example, in one instance, sex workers were deeply offended when asked if they would like to be rehabilitated. They earned enough money to send back to their homes. What they wanted was to have education for their children and protection against AIDS and other health facilities.

In South Asia, there are different frameworks that exist for trafficking. In Pakistan, there is a moralistic framework where everybody is criminalised, from the victim, the middleman and everyone who is involved in the sex trade. To the abolitionist framework, which operates in most parts in South Asia, the victim is seen as being rescued and the rest of the trade is criminalised. What South Asia has is non-implementation of abolitionist law. There are other frameworks for dealing with sex work that come from Europe, e.g. human rights framework and one that focuses on labour laws and/or other protections. South Asia doesn't have any of those latter frameworks. But, the debate continues because if sex work is legalised, there is data to show that the industry proliferates. But at the same time, if the sex trade is not legalised, the sex workers become extremely vulnerable to abuse and violence.

There is a close link between trafficking and migration. Only four per cent of people in the 1940 who migrated for work were women, now it's 50%. Women migrate

<sup>1</sup> Article 7,8 of the ICC

across borders for work. Often they leave because of violence and abuse, poverty or discrimination. They are sometimes subjected to trafficking and exposed to horrendous immigration regimes. To counter trafficking by preventing women's migration is to lock them into domestic systems of oppression. Measures taken to prevent women from migrating such as requiring permission of male members of the family or government sanction may actually compound the problem. What is needed is an effective system that prevents women from being abused during the process of migration and this can only take place if the approach to trafficking is designed within a human rights framework. The issue that emerges at the root of the trafficking problem is not that of a woman but that of an undocumented worker, as women who are abused and can't go back because they are undocumented.

Pages of newspapers in South Asia are full of tales of domestic violence. In 2002, 450 honour-killings were reported in Pakistan, 15,000 young brides are burnt to death every year in India, and ten women a week are subject to acid attacks in Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> Violence by intimate family members is one of South Asia's darkest legacies. Forty percent of all sexual abuse cases in India are about incest. In a survey on violence against women in India, 94% of the cases involved an offender who was a member of the family.<sup>3</sup>

According to international standards, Governments have due diligence duty to prevent, punish and prosecute those who commit acts of violence against women for whatever reasons including customary practices. Is there legislation in place to fight these problems? Referring to the 'pending phenomena' in South Asia where all the relevant laws are pending forever - sexual harassment, rape, etc - domestic violence legislation has also been added to the list.

The lack of economic independence on the part of women and their inability to move out of a violent situation and state inaction against perpetrators of violence perpetuate an ideological belief that violence may even be justified and, if it is not, it is not a terrible matter that requires concerted action.<sup>4</sup>

The insensitivity of the criminal justice system has also been highlighted in many studies. A survey of judges in the region pointed to the fact that 48% of judges agreed that it was justifiable for men to beat their wives. Seventy-four per cent endorsed the view that even in cases of violence, the preservation of the family should be the primary concern. In South Asia, there is a lot of sensitisation work to be done, but mainly in the urban areas and at the highest level.

Other related issues to be considered are the existing support services, e.g. shelters and other kinds of services a country should maintain. In South Asia, shelters are often

like jails. In the last two decades, there has been a heavy reliance on legislation and law-based advocacy to address VAW. An interdisciplinary approach is required, as experiences from Latin America show.

The failure of the law is particularly relevant when it comes to customary practices in the region that are violent towards women. South Asia is perhaps the region with the largest number of customary practices that are violent towards women. In response to the international critique of our practices, we have had mixed local responses. One is to say that this is an internal issue and not a concern to the rest of the world; that some of the practices can be justified by the internal logic of our cultural systems and that any attempt to critique and eradicate such customs is part of the arrogant legacy of colonialism and westernisation. However, women's groups within these societies have also taken up these issues and highlighted them as evidence of the low status of women in South Asian societies. These customary practices are in conflict with the international obligations that South Asian states have voluntarily taken upon themselves. The charge of westernisation is also disingenuous since many of these societies are rapidly globalising and the question of culture seems primarily relevant only to the subordinate position of women.

Some of the terrible customary practices referred to in a study are bride burning, acid throwing, honour killing, forced marriages, child marriages, *sati*, etc. The failure of the state to criminalise such practices, often due to political reasons, has led to their being seen as 'normal'. Violence against women is linked to economic independence, to class and caste issues, to South Asian attitude towards female sexuality and to models of masculinity.

All the Governments of the SAARC region have responded positively to the challenges posed by violence against women in the region and there has been a great deal of advancement, especially in the area of standard-setting and the enactment of policies and programmes. The policy framework has been developed in most of the countries of the region though much may not have changed at the local level. Ten years after Beijing, it is still a concern that, except for India where a bill is pending with the legislature, none of the countries of the region have adopted domestic violence legislation or made the necessary changes to anti-trafficking legislation. However, programmes and policies are in place and a great deal of activity has been conducted by women's ministries, national commissions and individual government departments. There have been many training programmes

2 OXFAM study

3 UNIFEM p. 10

4 OXFAM

also for senior-level policy officers and other members of the criminal justice system.

The changes in South Asia have also been made possible by the activism of civil society and the foresight of many women's NGOs. Research from around the world point to the fact that violence against women can only be combated if there is a healthy partnership between women's groups and the state apparatus. While women's groups must protect their independence, on certain issues they have to work effectively with the criminal justice system, joining forces to protect the rights of women victims. Moreover, law is an important tool but, only as one of the many strategies available to us. While fighting for justice through the legal system, we should also try and put in place education policies, health strategies and community-level programmes that promote equality between men and women and teach non-violent methods of resolving conflict. A multi-pronged approach to violence against women will result in far-reaching changes, transforming attitudes and practices so that men and women can live in equality and dignity.

Finally, religions and cultures are not static and can be transformed and have been interpreted in diverse schools throughout the centuries. But, when any school or culture claims that its survival is linked to the oppression of women, then it has ceased to be a culture worthy of respect. As women and as nations, there is a need to strive to ensure that the religion one believes in, the culture we grew up in, aspires for the highest standards and works towards the dignity of all human beings. People who believe in human rights must never give up the struggle to fight for the soul of our religious and cultural traditions.

## Panel Discussion

Dr. Shalini Bharat, the first discussant, touched upon three aspects of violence. Firstly, psychological impairment is as important to address as physical harm and pain since, often, women are suffering mentally and psychologically. Secondly, the issue is not of any drastic consequences but, of a gradual process of health impairment, e.g. infertility, STIs, HIV and unintended pregnancy are some of the consequences of violence inflicted on women. Thirdly, violence is not just the actual act of violence as the threat and fear of violence are as damaging as the act of violence.

The speaker emphasized the link between violence against women and HIV. The Government data in India shows that there are 5.4 million HIV cases; however, given the stigma attached to it, the figures may be much more with many cases of infection being undetected. There is feminisation of HIV/AIDS as the region has the highest

number of HIV positive cases among women of 16-19 years and 20-24 years. The gap between the male-female ratio is narrowing from 4:1 to 3:1. Increasingly, younger married women are now becoming HIV positive. Hence, marriage is not really a protection; in fact, in many countries of Africa and in South Africa, it was found that sexual coercion within marriage and stable relationships increases HIV cases as much as six to eight times. Intimate partner violence or domestic violence is linked to HIV infections, too. Further, sexual coercion during armed conflict, insurgencies and riots increases the risk of HIV.

It is also important to understand the links with reproductive health. The risk of HIV/ AIDS is also more whenever there is an age gap between partners as young women and adolescence girls have immature cervix and, vaginal lacerations during sexual coercion that heighten the risk of HIV. It has been noted that in the South Asia region, female sterilisation is the major method of birth control and women as young as twenty-four years of age opt for it. The younger the age of sterilisation, the more important it is for women to be protected, but this is not happening. The other reality is of widow 'inheritance' who then passes on HIV infections to other family members. HIV infections among women cause violence, which includes in many parts burning of women and extreme forms of physical assault.

Legal mechanisms to curb violence are not effective. The health systems need to manage sexual coercion and rape victims proactively and provide ARV (Anti-Retro Viral) treatment for rape victims and victims of sexual coercion.

Sapana Malla, the second discussant, noted that violence is taking place at various levels from the home to the community and not only by state actors but also non-state actors. The victims are not only adult women but children, too, and there are also cases of female foeticide.

Even though Governments in the region have been taking initiatives like reforming the law, fulfilling some of the commitments made in Beijing and in relation to the CEDAW Convention, the goal to end violence against women is yet to be achieved. Does law respond to society or does society respond to law? Law can be an initiator of change, an indicator of change and it can be an interrogator of change. In South Asia, the present discriminatory laws and implementation of laws have made women more vulnerable towards violence. Denial of equal economic rights has left women without any choice and forces many to remain within violent relationships. Denial of equal citizenship rights has challenged women's identity and affects the exercise of women's rights. Lack of right to sexuality makes women vulnerable towards HIV/AIDS.



Another problem prevalent in South Asia is that, on one hand, Governments may recognise that violence against women is a violation but, either there is no law to punish acts of violence against women or the law is not implemented and no one gets prosecuted. The state, in effect, encourages commission of VAW and violators remain unpunished. The problem is that there are gaps in the law on sexual harassment, a very narrow definition of rape and of trafficking being used in the region.

Currently, there is a debate going on in India and in Sri Lanka vis-à-vis the domestic violence bill, whether to provide mediation or a protection order first. The question Governments need to look at is: without protection, how will women have the right to negotiate? The legal system, with all its complexities, makes it difficult for women to get justice thus, accounting for the low reporting rates as well as conviction rates.

The challenge is to design an appropriate framework so as to create an enabling environment for women to exercise their right. Organisations and agencies need to challenge patriarchy, masculinity, normative values and religious beliefs especially in the context of a globalised open market situation, particularly in the current political context of 'controlling terrorism', in the context where imperialism and fundamentalism are increasing. The inadequacy or absence of laws puts a question to the commitment of the Governments, particularly when it has been acknowledged in the Beijing Declaration that gender-based violence is a barrier for peace, equality and development.

Barrister Zafar-ullah Khan, the third discussant, focused on Pakistan's response towards violence against women. The Government of Pakistan has introduced an amendment in the Penal Code, recognising the crime of 'Honour Killing.' This is based on the principle that honour killing under any pretext is considered murder. But, this law will be implemented through a court procedure or the perpetrator is awarded 'punishment circumstances', e.g. the customary practice of 'swara' where women and girls are exchanged to settle disputes, or in lieu of a compromise as in the case of murder, the criminal system is followed.

In the case of 'zina' or adultery under the *Hudood* laws, two amendments have been introduced: (1) no woman accused of Hudood case can be arrested without the prior permission of the court; and, (2) the investigation has to be done by a very senior officer.

The Government has also enacted a special law dealing with trafficking and special provisions have been made to deal with trafficking in women and children. Other laws relevant to violence against women include the amendments in certain laws with regard to 'burn' cases. This amendment in the legal procedure suggests that a

statement of the victim, which in 99% cases are women, is considered a declaration, and can be recorded by a doctor. Previously, only a magistrate could do so for it to be accepted as the basis of a conviction.

Presently, the Government is also considering a law on domestic violence based on an all-encompassing definition that recognises economic abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse and verbal threats as violence; it will include harassment, sexual abuse, stalking, denial of property rights and financial rights which a woman is entitled to, by law, in Pakistan. Protective mechanisms proposed include interim orders and interim injunctions. The Government is also considering enacting laws to have not only the penal sanctions in place but also the compensation built in.

## Discussion

There was a lot of discussion on violence against women and some countries like Bhutan even saw it as the most critical issue which needed to be addressed. Other countries like Sri Lanka reported that when the bill for violence against women was being discussed in parliament, many parliamentarians said that it was against their culture to convict people for violence against women. It was evident that the domestic violence bill has not been introduced in most countries while in other countries it is still being debated in parliament. Participants noted that violence against women was a structural issue and it requires a comprehensive response mechanism which includes legislation along with support structures.

Strategies were shared, including legislation, establishing police desks for women and children, gender sensitisation of the police and the judiciary, land ownership, economic opportunities. It was suggested that a range of penalties/punishments should be introduced for perpetrators of violence against women. For example, in Pakistan, capital punishment is the only punishment for gang rape. Male judges are reluctant to award the punishment. Of course, the punishment should not be light but neither should it be very extreme.

Community strategies have also proved effective. In India, community workers had devised innovative strategies to deal with violence, e.g. like the peaceful 'Janta Courts'. Women beat kitchen utensils to attract attention of other community women when they suffer from abuse, and other women come to their rescue. Introducing mediation, counseling and involving communities have been shown to be more effective, as a first level of intervention. There was a need to link the community level activities, which supported the justice system, with the official criminal justice system.

## Women's Representation, Effectiveness and Leadership in South Asia

Presentation by Ms. Khawar Mumtaz

Chaired by Government of India

South Asia stands out for its dynamic women leaders who reach the highest political offices in the region even where women as a whole are downtrodden, shackled by illiteracy and customary practices, denied mobility, inheritance and a voice in decision-making. Sri Lanka was the first in the region to elect a female Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandranaike as far back as 1960. Since then, a string of distinguished women leaders have followed in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The paper examines the context of women's political participation, the factors promoting women's participation and the facilitation of women's entry in the electoral process, the role of different institutions, non-government actors including men as enabling agents and the efficacy of tools and processes developed by them, the impact of women's reserved seats on gender-sensitive governance and their agency, the challenges to women's participation, and the way forward.

The elevation of women to the helm of national affairs has not translated into greater participation of women in politics or other avenues of decision-making. Currently, women's reserved seats provided for in the legislatures of Pakistan and Nepal and those in Bangladesh have lapsed in 2001, and, likewise, at the local government level in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal<sup>5</sup>. Sri Lanka has no special provision for women's representation in any tier. Generally speaking, female participation in South Asian parliaments is steadily but slowly improving, as the five-year comparison below indicates:

Country	Total Seats in Lower Chamber	Seats held by Women 2004	% Seats held by Women 1999	% Seats held by Women
Pakistan	342	74	21.64	2.8
India	543	48	8.84	8.8
Bangladesh	300	6	2.0	12.4
Sri Lanka	225	10	4.44	4.9
Nepal	205	12	5.85	5.4
Bhutan	150	14	9.33	2.0
Maldives	150	3	6.0	6.3
S.A. Total	1982	167	8.43	7.4

Source: *Women Representation in Pakistan's Parliament (Background Paper)*. PILDAT, Lahore. 2004. P.12

Women's legislative representation declined in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in recent years but, the overall regional figures show an increase due to the rise in the level of

women's representation in the lower houses of Bhutan, Pakistan and, marginally, in Nepal. The substantial improvement in Pakistan's case is attributed to the quantum leap made in the 2002 general elections, as a result of reservation of 17% seats in the national legislature (60 seats) for women. In addition, 14 women were returned on directly contested seats, partly because of the condition of a graduate degree for all parliamentary contestants that excluded a number of male politicians.



Perhaps the greatest impact of women's induction into politics has been the creation of critical space for them at the local government level – in India, through the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Constitution (1993), the Devolution Plan Ordinance in Pakistan (2000), the Local Self-Governance Act (1999) in Nepal and the Act Number 20 of 1997 in Bangladesh. Notwithstanding the progress made by some individual states, in South Asia as a region, the average membership rate of women in parliaments is one of the lowest in the world - lower even than that of East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Socio-economic indicators for women in the region are not encouraging. This is manifest in the gender gap in education. Economic activity and employment indicating subordination of women are the "most distorted sex ratios in the world -... only 940 females for every 1000 males."<sup>6</sup> India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have shown a decline in HDI rankings between 1998 and 2000. The gender-related empowerment measure (GEM) reflecting the extent of women's involvement in economic and political activities is also generally poor with the exception of Pakistan (0.414 %) that improved its position with the reservation of women's seats at different representative tiers in 2002. Where indices are relatively better, as in the case of Maldives and Sri Lanka, these have not translated into any substantive improvement in women's political representation.

Women's subordination in the region is acknowledged to be structural. As the *Human Development in South Asia 2003* report succinctly puts it, "the embedded

5 The Constitution in Nepal was suspended by King Gyanendra on 1 February 2005 for a period of 3 years. The parliaments had been dissolved in October 2002 following the massacre in the royal palace that led to the death of King Birendra. Nepal is discussed with reference to the suspended Constitution in this paper.

6 Mahbub-ul-Haq Development Centre, *Human Development in South Asia 2000*. Karachi, Oxford University Press. 2000. p.2

system of patriarchy in South Asia<sup>7</sup> with the result that “discrimination against women in South Asia is far worse than in most other developing countries.” Women, especially those belonging to the powerless groups find themselves doubly disadvantaged and vulnerable. Hence, the sad reality in South Asia is that, even where the *condition* of women may have improved, their social *position* has remained largely unchanged.

The political context reflects the social framework. Political participation for women, from casting votes to contesting elections is, thus, fairly prohibitive (with some exceptions like that of Maldives where the voter turn out of women in the 1999 general elections was higher at 84% than that of men at 71%).<sup>8</sup> By and large, political parties tend to keep women on the periphery, delegated to women’s wings where their major task is to mobilize female voters. They are not inclined to give tickets to women as candidates and those who are not part of the political elite do not have the necessary resources to contest elections. Women who have broken out of the mould belong largely to the elite where some of the barriers, e.g. of education and mobility, for instance, have been removed and kinship considerations have taken precedence over the party. Given the dynastic nature of politics in the region, it is not surprising that all women heads of government/state and most women in political leadership are from political families (as indeed most male leaders).

#### **Determinants of women’s political participation:**

Women’s political participation in South Asia has been promoted and facilitated by a complex set of forces. Women’s entry into representative politics has been shaped by the experience of colonialism through the nationalist struggles, which legitimises women’s participation in the political arena and the space thus becomes available to them. The foundational principle of equality of all citizens adopted by each state in the region regardless of their form of governance, and women’s own agency for pushing for social and political rights, has been important. For example, in India, women are now lobbying for 33% quota in parliament as well. The international women’s movement that, in 1975, triggered and galvanised the women’s movements in the region as well played a role. The external pressure have been generated by the UN Conventions like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, subsequently, other instruments (CEDAW) and declarations (Cairo, Beijing) that the countries signed up on.

Essentially, the states of the region are patriarchal, sometimes benevolent and sometimes restrictive and discriminatory, being in a sense compelled by the needs of modernisation and integration into the global system to bring women into the public sphere but continuing to subordinate them at the same time.<sup>9</sup> The impact of

political processes is mediated by class and other socio-economic factors as is evident by the catapulting into positions of power women like Sirimavo Bandranaike, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sheikh Hasina, Khalida Zia and Chandrika Kumaratunga.

#### **Women’s representation - the current situation:**

Women’s representation in the South Asia region is at two levels, 1) in national and provincial/state legislatures, and, 2) in local governments. In the former, they can play a role as law- and policy-makers and in the latter, in development-related implementation. The experience of respective states reveals that, collectively, the number of women in legislatures has been lower than 9 percent over the last five years. This, despite Beijing Platform for Action’s goal of adequate representation of women in all decision-making bodies and the recommendation of creating a “critical mass” and “gender balance” in political decision-making.

In the case of Pakistan, the time-bound affirmative action of reserved seats lapsed after the election of 1988 and women were reduced to four and six, respectively, in the elections of 1993 and 1997. In Nepal, eight women were returned in the general elections of 1991 and seven in the 1994 mid-term elections in a house of 205 (less than 4%.) In Bangladesh, there were six women in parliament in 2004, after the lapse of women’s reserved seats in 2001. In India, women’s political representation at the legislative level has declined from 49 in 1999 to 44 in 2004 in the directly elected Lower House (*Lok Sabha*) whereas in the Upper House (*Rajya Sabha*) it increased from 20 in 1999 to 28 in 2004 — the cumulative rate still hovering at less than 9 percent.

The above picture reflects the dismal situation where women given their disadvantaged position in society are unable to enter or compete in the political arena. The expectation that they would overcome their constraints in a specified period has proven to be misplaced (as evident in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh). It is obvious that women’s political participation does not occur in a vacuum but is determined by their status and position in society and the way their roles are viewed.

On the other hand, rather dramatically, South Asia has experienced the opening of space for the entry of large numbers of women in public decision-making through local government institutions in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. That this space is threatened and

7 Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre, *Human Development in South Asia 2003*. Karachi, Oxford University Press. 2004. p.80.

8 Usha Sharma, *Women in South Asia: Employment Empowerment and Human Development*. Delhi, 2003. p.248.

9 Shirkat Gah in Tambiah (ed), *Ibid*. p.183.

faced with hurdles and obstacles emanating from the deep-rooted patriarchal structures can also not be denied. Nevertheless, it is a window of opportunity to be grabbed for further mobilisation of women.

## Effective Participation

Some of the issues related to effective participation are the modality of elections, e.g. direct vs. indirect. Indirect representation limits participation as women become dependent and participation is inhibited by party dynamics and politics. It has also been seen that a critical mass (currently less than 9% women in legislatures in South Asia, except Pakistan) is needed, as token participation is not enough. Only then can issues that are priority for women be taken up. At the same time, whenever the quotas and reserved seats lapsed, women's representation went down. In Pakistan, the quota has actually triggered off participation as sixteen women were elected to parliament on general seats.

## Representation

**The Challenges:** Women's social subordination and deeply-entrenched biases (social barriers) continue to pose a challenge for even those women who have been elected. The intransigence of male colleagues including the *Nazim*, *sarpanch* or chairman who deny them the space to speak, are reluctant to include them in decision-making, do not share information nor take them seriously or acknowledge them as equal in the forum. This is compounded by inadequate knowledge of administrative systems and requisite skills for participation in the business of the institution.

The laws that enable women's access to political institutions often suffer from internal weaknesses. For instance, the indirect election on reserved seats opens the door for proxy representation and dynastic politics besides giving the dominant political party the opportunity to inflate its majority (e.g. Pakistan in the past, and Bangladesh). Women having to represent three times the size of constituency than men in union *parishads* in Bangladesh or their absence not affecting the quorum of meetings, leaves room for their deliberate exclusion and marginalisation.

Inadequate critical mass for effective participation, especially at national level, continues to hamper women's participation and leadership. Women also lack cooperation and support from male family members especially at the local government level. Once they are elected, the support of family members is withdrawn, especially when conflict between their reproductive and political roles arise.

There is an absence of level playing field (resources, access, information), which NGOs are trying to fill. The will is missing both in political parties and government to

mainstream women in the political process. The resources required for inducting women into formal structures (and not just elite women) are not forthcoming.

## Good Practices

There are many examples of good initiatives, 'best practices' in the region, some of which are mentioned in the report, e.g. mobilisation of NGOs and activists to ensure women's participation, as in the case of Pakistan and India. There have been successful initiatives for building of consensus among women across party lines for a common goal and cause. Training programmes for women representatives in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have reached out to thousands of women representatives. Support groups and networks have been developed to end isolation of and hostility to women representatives

**The Way Forward :** Achieving the Beijing Platform for Action's goal of adequate representation of women in all decision-making bodies for South Asia will require the following steps to go forward:<sup>10</sup>

- Introduction of affirmative action in the countries where it does not exist to reserve seats for women to ensure a "critical mass" (33 percent) at different tiers of representative bodies to be elected directly from their constituencies, with provisions for the inclusion of marginalised women, to continue until women's equal participation in the political process is achieved.
- Removal of distortions in the reserved seats system to create an even playing field by instituting direct constituency-based elections and mandating women's presence in committees and bodies to prevent their exclusion from decision-making. Removing any other anomalies that place a burden on women compared with men.
- Ensuring equal participation of women in political process through a mandatory 20 percent women's membership in political parties as a qualification for participation in elections; institution of a special fund for female candidates, irrespective of political affiliations, to contest elections at all levels.
- Capacity-building of women in local government, provision of information and skills for playing an effective role.
- Creating an enabling environment for women through gender sensitivity training for male members of local government, providing security against physical

<sup>10</sup> This section represents an amalgam of thinking and recommendations contained in various reports, documents and discussions by NGOs, academics and official committees most of which have been quoted and referred to in the main body of this report..



threats, violence and harassment and provision of resources. NGOs should be facilitated to play a more coordinated role in linking elected women, catalysing platforms and networks of solidarity and support. All barriers to women's participation in political processes particularly of discriminatory legislations and structural barriers that entrench inequality between classes and gender should be removed.

**Presentation by Mehnaz Rafi**  
**Member, National Assembly of Pakistan**

Ms. Mehnaz Rafi noted that women's participation over the years has increased but is still quite low. The speaker stated that the major reasons for women not participating in the overall political process are diverse, including negative social and cultural practices, discriminatory legislation/policies and programmes. Also, there is lack of political will and absence of a meaningful or effective affirmative action.

The speaker informed the group that in the past, women politicians have been involved in mobilising people to vote or running a campaign for their party leaders but have not been given a decision-making role. In some areas of Pakistan, women did not even participate as voters or as candidates, e.g. in the tribal areas. The representation of women in 1985 was 9.7% and, in 1988, it was 10.1%, in 1990, it was 0.9%, in 1993, it was 1.8% and in 1997, women's representation was at 3.2%. In the Senate, in 1985, there was 0% women's representation, in 1988, it was 1.1 %, in 1990, again 1.1%, in 1993, it was 1.1% and, in 1997, it was 2.3%. In the local bodies, there were 1,736 women and 13,853 male representatives who were elected.

Women's participation changed dramatically in 1999 when General Pervez Musharraf announced 33% seats would be reserved for women in all the tiers of the government. At the Union Council level, 33% seats were filled through direct elections. The local government election of 2000/2001 has changed the landscape of women's political participation in Pakistan. It was observed that almost 40,000 women had been elected in the local government elections. Of these, 32,000 came through women's constituencies based on direct elections at the Union Council level. These women are now the leaders of their communities, villages and towns, having overcome many challenges, constraints and barriers at all levels, from the household to the Council. They are literate, non-literate, poor, rich, housewives, social workers, political activists and professionals. For the majority of them, it is their first exposure to political life and they have a long way to go. Prior to the elections, there was a popular misconception that women would not want to contest the elections at the grassroot level.

Women in local government deal with decision-making at the micro-level and have contributed in terms of voicing women's concerns and demanding a share in the development funds for their respective area. A further 17% women came in through proportional representation at the national level, e.g. 73 women in a house of 342. In the Senate, there are 100 members and 18 of these are women. In the four provincial assemblies, of the total 1170 public representatives, 233 are women.

Ms. Mehnaz Rafi briefed the meeting about the number of initiatives taken by the government, such as the National Commission on the Status of Women, Gender Responsive Budgeting, National Committee on Violence and the Gender Reform Action Plans aimed at mainstreaming gender into government. She concluded that the high visibility of women needs to be sustained through their involvement in decision-making, media and civil society support.

**Presentation by Begum Syeda Fatima**  
**Ward Commissioner, Dhaka City Corporation, Bangladesh**

Begum Syeda Fatima expressed her gratitude to those women who had dared to take the first steps for political representation, making it possible for others to follow.

She noted women's multiple roles and contributions to society, as home-makers, as workers, and as professionals. In 2001, Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia took initiatives for women's empowerment, one of which was electing women to Union Parishads, Pouroshova and City Corporations. Currently, there are 12,000 women representatives working all over the country. These representatives work to improve women's position at home as well as in the society. They organise meetings and seminars to raise awareness and discuss barriers, be they social or legal. The Councillors have the authority to appear in Family Courts and to form a jury for a case; the City Corporation offers legal aid and legal counselling services to women. The speaker mentioned that the representatives of the City Corporation work with poor women in slums.

Women representatives have lobbied for rights and the government has taken initiatives such as free education up to higher secondary level for women, death penalty for acid throwing crimes, laws related to dowry, appointment of women in decision-making positions in the civil services, judiciary, etc. Due to the intervention of women councilors, women are able to access more opportunities in sports, in healthcare, in micro-finance, etc. Trafficking in women is a serious problem that has received constant attention. In conclusion, Begum Syeda Fatima noted that there are many challenges and social barriers and much more needs to be done for women's empowerment.

**Presentation by Ms. L. Feroze Begum**  
Mayor, Karnool Municipal Corporation, India

Mrs. L. Feroze Begum shared her experiences, including problems faced and challenges met in providing improved civic amenities during her tenure as Mayor of the Municipal Corporation. Due to the reservation of 33% seats for women by the state government of Andhra Pradesh, the post of Mayor of Karnool City Corporation was reserved for women and she had the opportunity to contest the elections and was elected as the Mayor. She is the first woman Mayor of the city and also the first Muslim woman Mayor in India. Faced with the typical city problems of sanitation, street lighting, roads and drains, and resource constraints, she instituted revenue reforms to improve the financial position of the city corporation. Ensuring that the targets of the Central Government for the welfare of women and children are met is a key role of the Mayor.

Most of the women who come into politics are poor and non-literate and, they have inadequate knowledge. They face many problems from their constituents. Sometimes, she pointed out, the same family members who have supported them through the elections do not allow them to make decisions. She was of the view that the government should take appropriate steps to encourage women to stand for public office. There is also a need to train women to become independent decision-makers, so that they can act individually in their post.

**Presentation by Ms. Mishree Giri**  
Ward Representative, Nepal

In an animated and passionate voice, Ms. Mishree Devi informed the meeting about her experiences as a Ward Representative of a Village Development Council in Nepal, recounting her own experiences of discrimination that reflects the societal norm. The situation is improving gradually with more parents sending girls to school, improved health-seeking behaviour for women, etc. Government policies and programmes in agriculture, education, health, expansion of infrastructure, etc has facilitated the change.

Approximately 40,000 elected and nominated women have served a term already under the special provision of the Local Governance Act. Women Development and the *Jagriti* programme of the Village Development Committees has facilitated self-help groups for savings and credit, coordinated by the Women Development Offices in all 75 districts.

Ms. Mishree Devi noted that the internal situation of conflict has an adverse effect on any gains that are made through the efforts of the government, NGOs and women activists and representatives. There is internal displacement, men migrate for work and women are left

to fend for themselves and their children. This also leads to increased violence against women, rape and abuse, and trafficking. She quoted the example of how women in her district are persecuted for witchcraft. There is a need to have more programmes that are sustainable and innovative to protect and promote women's rights.

## Discussion

There was considerable discussion on women's political participation, with a focus on affirmative actions required to encourage women to join mainstream politics and on the need to create enabling environment for them. The existing culture of politics was discussed, e.g. that of patronage, of hierarchical structure, of politics based on money and muscle power and of increasing militarisation.

The issue of reserved seats was discussed at length. Ms. Salma Khan, Ms. Ayesha Khan and Ms. Nimalka Fernando raised the issue of the efficacy of reserved seats. It was shared that in some quarters, there are misgivings about reservation for women as it tends to hinder effective participation of women on critical issues. Worldwide experience shows that quotas and indirect elections are ineffective in the end. Examples of countries that have gained from women's political participation and have made it mandatory to give a critical mass nomination of at least 33% were also discussed. In the case of Sri Lanka, it was considered appropriate to introduce an electoral list, ensuring mandatory fielding of candidates. Examples of countries who have already been through the nomination process were discussed, e.g. Paraguay, Tanzania, Korea and Nordic countries where each government has made it mandatory for political parties to nominate only 40% of candidates of either sex. This would also preclude the practice in some cases, where parties nominate women in constituencies where they are likely to lose.

The deliberations also focused on the financial implications of running campaigns and networking prior to standing for public office. It was suggested that the government should create a budget and allocate it for each candidate who is nominated to stand in the elections. This mechanism has already been set up very successfully in many countries in the world, e.g. a country in Latin America where a woman who gets 30% or more votes in the election is provided matching funds by the government, regardless of whether she wins or loses.

In this regard, it was important for civil society groups and women's representatives to foster a movement for public funding of elections so that no black money enters politics and it is easy for women to enter politics on a level playing field.

The idea of women from different parties uniting on one platform in trying to lobby for important issues, as in

Bangladesh where women from different parties have come together on a one-point agenda of increasing representation in parliament, was likewise discussed.

There was an exchange of thoughts on the role of the women's movement in terms of research and of participating in the political process, considering that change from outside is more difficult and that women's groups have clarity of issues.

A best practice from Pakistan was shared, e.g. the Aurat Foundation's long running programme to get women into politics, train them and support them with information and resource centres and networks. However, capacity-building of women representatives should not only be seen as the task of civil society or of women's organizations. In addition, it is important that men are sensitised and trained as well.

In responding to some of the questions and issues raised, Ms. Khawar Mumtaz agreed that the issue of reserved seats is a contested one. It is not a level playing field and the politics of power, muscle and money and militarization makes it even tougher for women to enter the arena. So, affirmative action was extremely important and once women are in, they have raised women's critical issues in parliament. However, the problem for women remains: they are not being heard by policy-makers as well as by their contemporaries. But, they have to be in the political arena where the discourse is taking place to change the attitudes of men. There was a need to devise mechanisms to ensure that women's participation becomes meaningful and mainstreamed into the political party structure.

Currently, she claimed, the democratic processes are not being followed in the party themselves. Hence, a democratic election, where the political parties themselves are not democratic, is not possible. Ms. Mumtaz and other participants suggested a change in the political structure but stressed that change will only come with more participation of women. It is equally important to look at how women are viewed in society and that discriminatory legislation and discriminatory practices be banned.

Other concerns raised by the group:

- The political dynamics wherein women lack power needs to be addressed; governments need to devise mechanisms to ensure that women's participation becomes meaningful and mainstreamed into the political party structure and there is need for transparency in the political system;
- The dynastic politics in South Asia where women are elected on the basis of their family background or the death of husband or father in office, must be addressed;
- Lobbying for a critical mass of women to be elected and not limited to the 33% of the total seats;
- There should be special funds allocated during the election period to support genuine candidates, especially women, to stand for elections;
- Improvement in the political structure and culture where presently 'money and muscle' dominate, and violence is common and, particularly for women where gender-based violence is used to intimidate them.



## Sharing and Learning Monitoring Mechanisms and Tools: MDGs, PRSPs, CEDAW and Media & ICT's

Chaired by the SAARC Secretary-General

### SAARC Gender Database

Mr. Kesang Wangdi  
Director, SAARC Secretariat



The need for a Gender Database (GDB) has been continuously articulated in many fora and consistently echoed in the South Asia Regional Ministerial Conferences through the years. The Bhutan Forward-moving Strategies of 2003

explicitly identified the need for sex-disaggregated data and for adequate mechanisms to monitor the progress of women against indicators specific to the realities of South Asia, whether against the backdrop of the Beijing Platform for Action or the Millennium Development Goals.

The Leaders of SAARC at the Tenth Summit recognized that a sex-disaggregated database provided by the Member States would be a valuable means of assisting the formulation of national and regional policies and programmes.

The SAARC and UNIFEM signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in December 2001 to:

- (i) Mutually cooperate in assisting the Member States to strive towards gender equality and women's empowerment; and,
- (ii) Promote mutual learning and cross fertilisation for effectively tackling the challenges relating to gender discrimination, women's human rights and women's participation

Among other things, the MoU identified the "Development of a SAARC Gender Database on Progress towards Gender Equality in the South Asia Region".

The presentation outlined the areas which need to be urgently covered in a central gender database in the region:

- Women's response to globalisation
- Women in conflict situations and peace-building
- Violence against women,
- Political participation and decision-making,
- Environmental conservation, and
- Stories of struggle and change

The objectives of the "Development of a SAARC Gender Database on Progress towards Gender Equality in the South Asia Region" are:

- To develop a regional resource database on the Progress of Women of South Asia by collecting, processing and analysing all relevant gender related information in the region.
- To enable advocacy with national governments and international agencies for introducing a gender perspective in governance and bringing about greater gender equality, equity and sustainable development.
- To catalyse gender mainstreaming in the region by enabling, informing, and advising governments to develop appropriate and gender sensitive policies, programmes and plans, using the vast reservoir of gender-related information.
- To facilitate drafting of a South Asian Region Plan of Action to promote gender equality, peace and development and end gender discrimination.
- To promote regional learning and provide a forum for sharing between the Member Countries

The project is aimed at achieving the following:

- Provide substantive inputs to the Progress of South Asian Women.
- Document existing empowerment strategies along with their impact for determination of more effective future strategies.
- Include best practices to empower women and end gender discrimination.

The GDB would be located in the SAARC Secretariat. It will function in close collaboration with UNIFEM, South Asia Regional Office. The scope and methodology of the project was also shared in the presentation, noting that primary research to generate information was necessary and the process would go beyond the traditional indicators to understand the status of women. Both tangible and intangible indicators would be studied and, hopefully, the results could provide new paradigms for gender equality. SAARC has identified the steps involved in the project, thus:

1. Prepare a concept paper on the SAARC Gender Data Base.
2. An Expert Group Meeting would be held in mid-June, comprising of relevant SAARC focal points, statistical organizations, relevant ministries, and research institutions of all the Member States to:
  - (a) Finalise the concept paper
  - (b) Discuss the methodology and indicators
  - (c) Identify a national research institution and a Core Group for each country, to advise/guide the process and feed information to GDB. The Core Group will comprise of government departments, researchers, women's groups, academia, etc.
  - (d) Determine time frames for various activities.



3. Collection and analysis of data and documentation of the Progress of South Asian Women.
4. Documentation of the policies, strategies and programmes of country governments, UN bodies and other international agencies for promoting women's rights and women's empowerment.
5. Documenting women's movement/NGO interventions and their impact.
6. Documenting strategies that have failed as well as those that have succeeded.
7. Commissioning short studies profiling ethnicity, religion, social classification and indigenous practices and their negative and positive influences on women as well as to gender relations.
8. The draft GDB will be initially presented at the appropriate SAARC meeting for feedback and comments that will be incorporated in the final document, for endorsement from the Member States and finalised.
9. Publishing the GDB and launching it at the appropriate SAARC Meeting.
10. Developing a dissemination strategy for the GDB using brochures, CD ROMs, posters, fliers, etc.
11. Organising round tables at country and regional levels with users and producers of data for learning and experience sharing.

Activities have been divided organisationally and programmatically. The following are the organisational activities:

- Identifying a key research institution in each SAARC country for being mandated as a partner in building the Gender Data Base in that country and for feeding data to the SAARC GDB on a regular and continuing basis.
- To constitute a Core Group of government departments, researchers, women's groups/NGOs, academia, etc. to advise/guide the process and feed information to the GDB.
- Mapping programme activities, strategies, investments and materials of national governments, UN Agencies, women's movement and other player/actors.
- Documenting changes brought about through women's empowerment programmes and strategies.
- Identifying and documenting good and emerging new practices.
- Identifying gaps and locating key partners to address these gaps.

Programmatic activities include the following:

## PHASE I

A compendium of social, economic, political and human rights initiatives made nationally, regionally and internationally will be collated to reflect on:

- Milestones achieved.
- Interventions made/enabled by governments, the women's movements, NGOs, international and UN agencies at various levels.

Analytical research as already outlined above and documentation of stories of experiences.

## PHASE II

- Documenting benchmarks of the women's movement in the SAARC region and within respective countries.
- Listing major legal and policy changes and landmark judgments made to end gender discrimination at the national and regional levels dating to the BPFA.
- Collating important agreements and international conventions such as CEDAW and others, e.g. migrant workers.
- Evaluating the progress to make these agreements operative and effective and document cases wherein these agreements have been operationalised successfully.
- Recording strategies that have proved useful in creating awareness for lobbying and advocacy.
- Identifying limitations for implementation and working out strategies to overcome them.
- Strategising on SAARC's role in supporting and advocating effective implementation.
- Identifying emerging trends and tools that can help in ending discrimination against women, equality of opportunity, equality of result, e.g. gender mainstreaming, gender audit and gender budgeting.
- Identifying new areas requiring efforts to check gender discrimination such as HIV/AIDS, trafficking, migration and conflict situations.
- Documenting and reviewing different interventions and lessons learnt.
- Conducting in-depth analysis of work on gender discrimination contextualised as increasing violence in society.

In conclusion, the presentation highlighted the positive aspects of the Gender Data Base, viz:

- The Gender Data Base would serve as a single-window, one-stop gender data-shop of SAARC in all aspects of gender equality.
- Facilitate and strengthen networking for regional-level advocacy.
- Build closer relations and cooperation between Member-Countries through the 'Women's Agenda'.
- Facilitate drafting of a South Asian Regional Plan of Action to promote gender equality, peace and development and fight gender discrimination.
- It would be a historical regional initiative.

- It would certainly give an unmistakable signal of the Member-Countries' commitment and support to gender justice and empowerment of women.

The project is presently underway. It is expected to be ready and will be launched at the appropriate SAARC Body in 2006. The GDB will have to be annually updated to enable the mechanism to attain sustainability within individual Member Countries, as well at the SAARC Secretariat level.

## CEDAW As A Monitoring Mechanism

Ms. Salma Khan  
CEDAW Committee Member



Ms. Khan briefly discussed CEDAW and elaborated on monitoring mechanisms, specifically in the context of state obligations. The Convention obligates a state and holds it responsible to implement the Convention,

particularly to address the substantive inequality between men and women in the public and private sphere of life. She observed that for purposes of monitoring, what the state achieves is more important than what it does, and this is the underlying focus of the monitoring system.

The state is accountable for the violation of individual rights by the state itself, private institutions, individuals and anybody living under the state jurisdiction. Under Article 18 of the Convention, state-parties undertake to submit to the Secretary General of the United Nations regular reports on the compliance of the provisions of the Convention as well as the progress made. Generally, after the initial report to the Committee is submitted (which is due to be presented within a year of ratification), the next reports have to be presented within four years of the previous report. A twenty-three member committee (in accordance with article 18 of the Convention), known as the CEDAW Committee, is set up to review the reports submitted.

Over the years, the monitoring mechanism has gone through changes as the Committee tried to improve its method of reviewing the reports and able to refine its own process. One result is that the reports are now much shorter and focused. Also, there is an emphasis now on appropriate measures undertaken by the state and the concrete results rather than a focus on gaps only. Emphasis is now on assisting states in fulfilling their obligation. The Committee also formulates time lines and looks at the efficiency of the reporting process. Ms. Khan said that the Committee has allowed combining as many as five reports, since many countries had not submitted reports, even when they had signed CEDAW as many as twenty years ago!

Except Nepal and Sri Lanka, all the other South Asian countries have entered reservations which the Committee takes very seriously as these are seen to be incompatible with the objective and purpose of the Convention.

The Committee continually interprets and clarifies various articles of the Convention. For example, the Convention was drafted nearly forty years ago and some issues were not taken into consideration then, e.g. the issue of violence against women. Therefore, the Committee uses interpretation, clarification of various articles and provisions of the Convention, which sometimes are explicitly mentioned, while at other times it is implied. For example, in the case of education and health, these are directly and explicitly mentioned in the Convention. Other issues like violence against women have not directly been mentioned in the Convention. However, there are as many as six or seven articles which can be interpreted to deal with the issue of violence against women, e.g. Article 6 focuses on one of the outcomes of violence against women, e.g. prostitution, Articles 2 and 5 deal with culture and stereotypes, Article 11 deals with women's rights, equal rights in employment, Article 12 deals with equal access to health, Article 15 with equality in the eye of law and Article 16 with equal rights of women in the family and in marriage. The Committee has now developed the process of formulating general recommendations to guide the state party, including guidelines on how to prepare a report. There are two types of general recommendations, some directly cover the provisions of the Articles and some are issues-related. An important general recommendation, which the Committee has adopted, is stated in Article 25 on affirmative measures to accelerate the *de-facto* equality of women. Both types of recommendations carry equal weight and the state party is equally obligated to fulfill the specific provisions under the Convention, as well as the general recommendation.

The Optional Protocol to the CEDAW Convention was adopted in 1999. The Committee has mandated itself to monitor individual claims of grave or systematic violation of women's rights put forth in the Optional protocol. Bangladesh and Nepal are the only countries that have ratified the Optional Protocol. Rapporteurs are appointed to improve the review process or head a Task force.

The Committee tries to establish a close working relationship with the state-party and inform it, through a constructive dialogue, and work with the country by looking at the major challenges and how best those can be resolved. On the basis of those constructive dialogues, the Committee issues a final outcome or Concluding Comments of the monitoring process and

each Concluding Comment is mirrored by recommendations directed to the state party.

The Committee has various means of gathering information, e.g. from the Secretariat which prepares a document for the UN agencies but, most importantly, from the NGOs who prepare a shadow report to the Committee. This system was introduced through a gradual process in the Committee after the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee. The scheduled meeting with the NGOs is part of the structured system.

The Committee has not limited itself to only monitoring and reviewing process of the Articles of the Convention. It also raises emerging issues, even if these are not covered under the general recommendation. For example, the Committee issued a statement whenever it felt that women were being affected: during a civil war in Rwanda, in Bosnia and during armed conflict, on exploitation of women and migrant labour from Philippines and other cases. Ms. Khan informed the group that the CEDAW Committee's major contribution has been the formulation of General Recommendation Article 19 and recommendations for women affected by the tsunami or the war in Afghanistan.

## **CEDAW Indicators for South Asia: An Initiative**

Prof. R. Savitri Goonesekere  
Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), Sri Lanka

Professor Savitri Goonesekere shared the research undertaken by her Centre to develop indicators to monitor CEDAW in the region, an initiative that was supported by UNIFEM. She appreciated the solidarity effort which UNIFEM has catalyzed and by bringing women's human rights to this region, adding that the indicators would support the UNIFEM-initiated process of taking stock by reviewing the implementation of CEDAW, recognising the gaps and strategising for moving forward.

CEDAW imposes obligations on the state to respect women's rights, protect women from infringement of those rights by third parties and to fulfill those rights with proactive interventions. It is important to have both civil and political rights, right to bodily integrity as well as right to basic needs, e.g. health, education, etc. In South Asia, the ideology of the indivisibility of human rights has not been internalised by the legal mechanisms and the law. For example, countries have set a minimum age of marriage, but have not made schooling compulsory. Further, the CEDAW process' emphasis on monitoring performance is not only putting the civil rights and security in place, but also the economic rights. And, that is of added value in the region since monitoring performance through development-specific indicators is the only way



that governments can be held accountable.

Women's family survival strategy should not be seen as a livelihood option as a woman who chooses prostitution or migrates for work in difficult conditions is

doing it for her family's survival and not to exercise her livelihood entitlement, which is primarily due to the failure of our governments to meet their commitments, e.g. the commitment that human rights are indivisible.

The CEDAW indicators have been crafted in a way to not only hold states accountable but, also, the private sectors' performance can be assessed and monitored for the realisation of women's rights. This is especially relevant in the context of globalisation, where states are pulling back and the private sector is taking over in some areas.

There are other monitoring processes which have been established such as the CEDAW reporting mechanism, the Optional Protocol which has been ratified and is an individual complaints procedure. Then, there is constitutional jurisprudence which has emerged from the South Asia region and which monitors the performance of our governments viz-a-viz the constitution and links it with CEDAW. This historical experience of ten years of monitoring with regard to BPFA and CEDAW can also be used for monitoring the MDGs. Prof. Goonesekere observed that the MDGs have contradictions, setting basic standards but, CEDAW has a much higher standard. The CEDAW indicators went beyond institutional constraints to realising women's rights and this brought out a whole range of qualitative indicators, with regard to laws, policies and programmes. The indicators devised by CENWOR are categorised as quantitative (the traditional indicators) and qualitative indicators, which are much broader, and provide the basis of assessment of performance of the key actors in realizing human rights by the state, the private sector and civil society.

The quantitative indicators focus on number, e.g. literacy rate, maternal mortality rates, labour-force participation rates and number of successful prosecutions. Sex-disaggregated data will have to be collected and analysis to be undertaken in terms of such data. Quantitative indicators provide information on the extent to which women enjoy equal rights and gender-based discrimination has been eliminated.

The qualitative indicators are broader and focus on legislation, institutional arrangements, programmes and policies that are conducive to implementing the rights referred to in each article of CEDAW, e.g. legislation on equal inheritance rights, law on nationality. Similarly,

policy indicators will refer to social and other government policies, e.g. policies on compulsory education, quotas in educational institutions for girl children, quotas for women in local and national legislative bodies and in decision-making positions. Programmatic indicators will refer to interventions such as legal aid services, shelters for women victims of violence, legal literacy programmes, food subsidies, micro-credit programmes, women and children's desks in police stations, "One Stop" service for women in hospitals and health centres.

The qualitative indicators will provide information on the measures taken by the government towards achieving women's human rights and the extent to which it fulfills its obligations to the Convention that it has ratified. Qualitative indicators may also be quantified to ascertain the situation of women. Thus, both can be combined to provide information on women's rights and elimination of discrimination, e.g. X number of law protecting women workers, X number of shelters for women victims of violence at the District, National levels.

The speaker concluded with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi: "When we initiate any policy or programme for reform, let us think of the weakest and the most disempowered; if any process can impact on that life, then we have achieved a lot."

Prof. Goonesekere stated that the indicators were a modest step to create synergy between CEDAW, which has been ratified by all the South Asian countries, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals so that, ultimately, the quality of life of women in South Asia can be improved.

### Monitoring MDGs for Gender-Responsive Indicators of the SAARC Region

Dr. S. K. Nath  
Additional Director General, CSO  
Ministry of Statistics and Planning, New Delhi

Dr. Nath explained the methodology developed by him to monitor the MDGs statistically, which he has also used for the SAARC countries through some case studies. This paper attempts to develop a quantitative tool for monitoring women-specific MDG indicators for the SAARC Region. A review of various socio-economic indicators including MDGs reveals that there are no uniform statistical methodologies used by the SAARC countries.

Another problem is the data system itself, e.g. data not being uniformly available and, for some countries, data is not available at all. The baseline year should be 1990 but, in many countries, the data for 1990 is not available. A rigid analysis has to be done to extrapolate, or

interpolate, to make the data system at par for consideration. Thus, comparison of performance of MDG indicators (in terms of absolute values of the indicators) across various countries of the SAARC Region does not appear to be statistically possible. This calls for formulation of an index which will allow computation of country-wise comparable indices in order to develop monitoring indices for the SAARC Region as a whole. Dr. Nath shared his attempt to develop a suitable methodology for such index for monitoring MDGs for the SAARC Region, the Monitoring Index of MDGs (MIM).

The progress on MDGs are to be reported every five years and, thus, quantitative index for monitoring is likely to be useful for monitoring MDGs in the SAARC region. Using 1990 as baseline, most of the MDG targets are to be achieved by 2015. It is expected that all countries would report their instruments in such a way that by 2015, the value of MIM should be at least close or equal to zero. Dr. Nath used twelve indicators out of twenty-four gender-sensitive indicators for the case study, because data was not available for all the indicators. The twelve indicators used for different goals are universal primary education, gender equality and empowerment, child mortality indicators, health indicators and development of global partnerships, among others.

Concluding, Dr. Nath reiterated the challenges of obtaining data for all the countries in the region. The data system is decentralised. There is no system of getting the data from one source. Generally, data is collected in the SAARC region through household surveys. But, the methodologies are different and the concept is different. There is no systematic collection of gender-responsive data. Also, data is not shared. Without improving the data collection system, the monitoring of the MDGs will not be possible. He recommended the development of a gender database for the SAARC region.

### Media and ICTs as Tools for Women's Advancement

Ms. Bandana Rana, Sancharika Samuha, Nepal

Information and communication is the core of every society's process of negotiating power, norms, values and realities. By the same token, the advancement of women in media and ICTs were identified at the Beijing World Conference on Women as one of the twelve critical areas of concern. At the time, central challenges were seen to be stereotyping of women in the media, the occupational segregation and glass ceilings encountered by women in the media profession and the need to harness the new electronic networks for women's empowerment. All of these challenges are still very much there, however, many more challenges have arisen with the advancement of ICTs and their inequitable spread within and among societies.







The ICT sector (as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio, computer hardware and software, computer services and electronic media like the internet) has relevance for women's empowerment as they can be used as

development tools, vehicles for greater participation in national, international and global structures, governance structures, platforms for business and economic empowerment, bringing the business to the doorsteps of rural women, avoiding middlemen and ensuring equal wage. New media spaces allow women to connect, network, find a voice, own and control information and knowledge. ICTs have been used most extensively to network, communicate and build alliances between the local and the global, especially by women.

A study was conducted by ISIS International where women reported that the ICTs have been very useful in building alliances and networks and in accessing venue for raising one's voice, in wider dissemination of low cost newsletters, in short wave radio and in accessing wider range of materials and rapid means of information exchange. However, ICTs have not been used consciously beyond these purposes for women's empowerment. Disregarding the potential of these tools can have a negative impact on women's advancement but, barriers persist for women in terms of socio-cultural discrimination and the lack of infrastructures that particularly impede women's access as they also have to cope with poverty, illiteracy and language barriers.

To achieve the objectives of the MDGs, CEDAW and the BPFA, media and ICTs can play a crucial role and be used as tools for social transformation and gender equality. ICTs have been used in skill development of women, to deliver educational and literacy programmes targeted to poor women, bring awareness and influence public opinion about equal rights of women, give them economic opportunities, lend a voice to fight against discrimination and, most importantly, lead them to empowerment.

ICTs can empower women and help them to overcome gender inequality by raising awareness of their social and political status and creating new economic opportunities. The use of ICTs in areas like health, education, agriculture extension and in law and social justice programmes brings about many changes to the delivery of these services. These are being tapped by women's organizations and civil society groups – through building communities and on-line networks, expanding women's access to global and local markets, developing women's ICT capabilities for furthering empowerment goals, employing ICTs for

human development in health, nutrition and education, and promoting advocacy & mobilisation and for solidarity-building.

There are several examples of successful ICT programmes, e.g. in Nepal, 'HipKnit<sup>11</sup>' is an e-commerce project that markets online a wide range of custom-designed woollen clothing hand-knitted in Nepal. The market has been taken to the doorsteps of rural women and, in eliminating the middlemen, has provided livelihood and economic empowerment to the poorest. There are examples of how health facilities have been improved and, also, there are examples of radio and video programmes on taking the health services to the public and also on education. In Bangladesh, the village phone programme, Grameen Telecom, has provided loans to Bangladeshi women micro-entrepreneurs to purchase and operate cellular phones.

New ICTs can enhance public health delivery, enable health education and information dissemination and offer simple solutions for collecting and analyzing information about disease and health-seeking behavior to help health interventions become more locally relevant.

In combination with old ICTs like satellite, radio and TV, ICTs offer many possibilities for non-formal and continued education, especially for women with constraints on mobility and access to public places. For example, in India, the Distance Education for Women's Development and Empowerment Programme is jointly operated by the Department of Women and Child Development and the Indira Gandhi National Open University. The programme provides a Certificate-level course based on a multi-media training package to make women's self-help groups sustainable by enhancing their decision-making ability and resource-management skills in 150 low literacy districts.

ICTs have also facilitated the building of a more inclusive public sphere – allowing the aged, the disabled and the discriminated to communicate, network and also to reach policy makers.

In conclusion, Ms. Bandana Rana noted that in spite of all the achievements, challenges remain. The digital divide exists in most of the institutional structures of the government and ICT is related more with science and technology and the women's focal point do not relate to it. The role of the gender advocate is really important, to build a broader perspective and link ICTs with gender. She drew the attention of the delegates to the failure of the 'The World Summit on Information Society' to promote gender equality as key concern in the ICT arena, and requested for country-level and regional advocacy during its second phase coming up in November, 2005.

11 Digital Dividends, <http://www.digitaldividend.org>

## Discussion

**Issues raised:** The reason why the feminist movement is not getting legitimacy is the lack of capacity of women to mobilise and organise. It's very easy to mobilise women for vested interests like getting votes or for economic purpose. But, making the movement indigenous, reaching and providing access to the disadvantaged women is even today a central issue. Translating all the concepts and making them real so that the ordinary woman can relate these concepts to herself is extremely important. It was regretted that there is an environment of mistrust between government and civil society, between national and international and among all development stakeholders.

It is important to capture the process data, as well to help assess the extent of women's satisfaction with services and whether they feel empowered to use them. Those are very important qualitative indicators. Commenting on Dr. Nath's presentation, which was very useful, the need is for data to be really generated and made visible below the district level to assess impact, especially at the rural level. It is very difficult to get data from the tribal areas.

**Responses:** Mistrust comes from the failure to perform. A process of an honest review through a monitoring process which is internal and, internalised, is needed. Therefore, the whole process of monitoring and finding out information on what's working and what's not working and then using that to catalyse activism to achieve those results, is one way of perhaps bridging that mistrust.

The monitoring indicators are both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative will, for example, limit the indicators to literacy, mortality, etc. The qualitative indicators will assess, for example, what has been done to intervene with the establishment of shelters for women and access to justice issue. To find out what are the interventions which go beyond numbers with regard to quality, e.g. what is the quality of the services offered, this is what qualitative data collection would do. An important fact is that indicators presuppose an information base and data collection.

The Centre for Women's Research trains people how to access information in a professional way as part of their research work and this results in good data. Projects on violence against women, for example, require a lot of qualitative data and this is achieved when a good community-based worker collects data. It was recommended that UNIFEM will support the training of community-based workers in data collection, as an important component of successful indicators.

S K Nath informed the participants that statisticians can, likewise, translate the qualitative indicators into quantitative indicators with certain methodologies.

## PRSP Vision: Gender Dimension

Chaired by the Government of Nepal

Prof. Mahmuda Islam, Women for Women, Bangladesh



Ms Islam stated that Bangladesh formulated its poverty reduction strategy following an extensive and participatory process towards pro-poor growth and sustainable development. Several thematic groups were formulated to prepare

sectoral strategy papers as a step towards the main report. Of the eight (8) thematic groups, one was on Women's Advancement and Rights. The Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs, being the lead agency for women's advancement, was given the responsibility of this thematic group. The speaker mentioned that the Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs formed a technical committee on women's advancement and rights. This technical committee consisted of members from civil society, organizations, academics, researchers, developments partners and the government. This committee worked on developing a specific paper on PRSP with a gender perspective. In addition, this technical committee on women's rights and advancement also coordinated with other thematic committees to ensure that the gender perspective was incorporated in all the other sectors. Finally, this committee established a linkage with PRSP, Gender Perspective Group, which consisted of women's organizations, civil society, development partners and the government.

The purpose of the committee on women's advancement was to look at ways of engendering the PRSP. Other reasons identified were to uphold fundamental human rights, to achieve poverty reduction and economic growth, to achieve sustainable social development and to address gender gaps in PRSP. While developing the report, the committee looked at gender as a cross-cutting theme and poverty with its multi-dimensional aspects such as economic deprivation (in terms of inadequate opportunities and time constraints), human deprivation (in terms of capability), vulnerability to risk and insecurity, political deprivation (in terms of inadequate political participation and empowerment), international deprivation (due to lack of concern about women in international fora) and, finally, the institutional deprivation (due to lack of gendered institutions).

The report on women's rights and advancement attempted to integrate gender from women's rights and advancement perspective. It did an extensive review, which identified various constraints faced by women due to the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty, and identified

seven strategic objectives for intervention during the next three (3) years. These are:

- Ensuring women's full participation in mainstream market-oriented economic activities;
- Improving women's efficiency particularly reducing time used to perform household and reproductive roles and responsibilities;
- Ensuring that infrastructure services reach them;
- Building women's capacity in accessing health and education and improving women's productive capacity in fulfilling personal goals;
- Ensuring social protection for women and reducing their risks, including violence against women;
- Ensuring women's political empowerment and decision-making. Here, it recommended that women's entry into parliament be through direct election;
- Ensuring women's concerns in international fora;
- Strategies for strengthening institutions, particularly in monitoring and evaluation.

The report emphasised the need for effective and continuous monitoring while also involving the wider public. It provided the guideline for identifying the partners and actors in the process and gender-responsive selection criteria. A medium-term policy matrix was also finalized. Monitoring and evaluation indicators were also provided.

Under the justice sector reform, law and justice, it was recommended that some immediate interventions be made. For example, the immediate withdrawal of reservations on CEDAW and the adoption of a uniform family code to protect the rights of women in the family: the women's movement has been lobbying for last two decades for these two demands. It also recommends amending Section 5 of the Bangladesh Citizenship Act of 1951 and Bangladesh Citizenship Order to recognize the right of every woman to transmit her citizenship to her children and her spouse. It also recommends amending family and inheritance laws to ensure woman's equal access to and right to own and inherit property.

Under political participation, the report recommended laws providing for direct election of women to the national parliament, also a recommendation from 'Women's Rights and Advancement Paper.' Ms Islam reported that the draft report does not incorporate all the recommendations but the committee is hopeful that the issues will be incorporated in the final PRSP. The Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs held a workshop with the civil society organizations and development partners to review the papers that they have facilitated on the advancement of women's rights.

In the process of the preparation of the PRSP, three aspects were highlighted. The formulation of programme

and projects and the main criteria to make this gender-responsive were identified. In particular, it was suggested that civil society, women's organizations and the Government be involved in the monitoring process.

Bangladesh expressed its commitment to achieve the goals of MDGs and PRSP. The report, 'Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerating Poverty Reduction', states, thus: "one of the important instruments to achieve the various MDGs and PRSP goals is to act pro-actively through goal-oriented interventions with relevant programmes".

## Linking CEDAW, BPFA and MDGs: Nepal's Experience

Mr. Shyam Sunder Sharma, Joint Secretary  
Ministry of Women, Children & Social Welfare, Nepal



Mr. Sharma presented Nepal's experience of linking CEDAW, BPFA and MDG as currently, the whole planning process and development activities are done in accordance with MDGs.

Nepal is trying to incorporate the MDGs in its periodical plans and programmes. The question is, how to link BPFA and MDG in the implementation process. Currently, the BPFA is analysed with reference to the over-all targets of MDGs. In Nepal, the periodical plan consists of five years and, therefore, the MDGs must be developed for a five-year cycle.

The process of linking requires an analysis of the Action Plans of CEDAW, the BPFA and the over-all targets of MDGs, classified in periodical and sectoral basis. This analysis is verified against the government's own policies, plans and programmes, whether they are compatible or incompatible with MDGs. Finally, plans and programmes are adjusted according to the MDG, BPFA and CEDAW classifications. The National Planning Commission has a specific project on studying MDGs with the help of UNDP.

The local bodies are informed and sensitized about the MDGs and are in the process of designing their prospective and yearly programmes for the Planning Commission according to the guidelines (which already include BPFA and CEDAW provisions) of MDGs. The private sector is also playing a role in taking on corporate social responsibilities. Mr. Sharma noted that the main purpose of the state is to have an equitable and prosperous society. In order to achieve this, Nepal has a four-pronged strategy, including gender mainstreaming, enabling environment for women and

developing a gender management system. For this purpose, periodical plans are formulated. Currently, Nepal is guided by its 10<sup>th</sup> plan.

Mr. Sharma noted that caution is required as it is difficult to introduce new things like MDG in already formulated plans and policies. There is the possibility of gaps in effective materialization process between consultants/experts and executing agencies like government organisations. There is a need to have more discussion between the various stakeholders to develop a common understanding of MDG even though it is difficult to bring all stakeholders and responsible agencies together as there could be difference of interests among interest groups, pressure groups, activists, donors, public institutions, etc. He emphasised that MDGs, BPFA and CEDAW are long-term strategies and the targets cannot be achieved in the allocated time-frame. There are resource constraints, both in terms of its limited nature and the need to reallocate in priority areas.

Mr. Sharma highlighted a number of problems which could occur in linking MDGs with BPFA and CEDAW into the development plan such as corruption and indecisiveness, and difference of value system could hamper the process. The limited capacity of the state in areas like governance and public management can be another constraining factor. Inefficient tools of management such as coordination, collaboration, networking and partnership could also stall the implementation of MDGs. Further, there are differences between the donor's priority and the needs of the State. Prevailing poverty and discriminatory distribution system is also an obstacle, as is the armed conflict with its severe effects in the society.

## Lessons Learned

The MDGs are not about a separate programme, each should be streamlined and included in all programmes and policies as guiding targets and goals. Periodical plans, plan of actions and other strategic documents are related with MDGs and these instruments should be correlated, coordinated and combined with each other. MDGs are compatible with BPFA and CEDAW so there is no difficulty in linking them.

There is a need for formulating comprehensive strategy document including all plans of actions, international commitments, national plan and relevant policies for their working mandate. It will be better if an effective and workable high-level mechanism is established to link all these documents and activities as consistent and correlated actions. Institutional linkage should be clearer to avoid institutional hierarchy and duplication of activities.

Mr. Sharma recommended that a regional mechanism should be established that can facilitate the linking of MDG, BPFA and CEDAW with state-level planning process so that it can facilitate uniformity, consistency and standardization of the linking process.

In conclusion, Mr. Sharma said that Nepal is fully committed to all the instruments developed by UN and is well aware that consistent implementation of CEDAW, BPFA and MDGs can help to accomplish an equitable and prosperous society

## Discussion

Participants expressed concern that the MDGs dilute the substantive equality contained in the BPFA and CEDAW. The focus has shifted from equality to minimum progress. CEDAW, BPFA and CRC have emerged through a historic process involving civil society and a wide-range of stakeholders; the MDGs and the PRSP have not. Should the focus now be only on the primary education of women and reduction of poverty for women? Or, is our goal the equal share of economic resources?

Some of the South Asian countries have achieved gender parity at the primary level of education but it really does not empower women or girls because they don't gain individual agency and they have no autonomy on their reproductive health, reproductive rights or even marriage, unless a girl attains secondary education (as noted in a number of studies like UNFPA's). The MDG may not be contrary to equality of women but it is definitely a shift from the focus of equality.

The example of Sri Lanka was shared, referring to the country as having the highest indicators in the region in literacy, parity, etc., but which emerged from the structural adjustment programme at a lower rung. There was concern that the PRSP is also donor-driven and national governments have no power or authority over resources which are being privatised.

It was stated that the PRSP focuses on macro-economic indicators and stability, and there is a feeling that its link with women's poverty and condition or improving the lives of people is fallacious. Has the PRSP been able to do eradicate poverty for women anywhere?

Some participants felt that all the UN organizations and the National Planning Commission in various countries, the focal point for the formulation of programmes and allocation of resources, are all speaking the MDG language, hence we have to engage with it as well. On the positive side, the MDGs have provided the opportunity to talk to these planners and organizations with whom we otherwise do not engage with, about gender issues. In Nepal, for instance, a round table with



women's groups, activists and journalists was organised and the Vice-Chair of the National Planning Commission, who is the key person to formulate the reports and programmes, was invited for a dialogue. The level of awareness particularly among women's groups was

initially quite low. Even now, many are unaware of MDGs. We need to ensure that the MDGs acknowledge the achievements that the BPFA and CEDAW have achieved and that the targets can be flexible and related to the needs of the country, thus, the need to be involved.



## Concluding Session

Chaired by H.E. Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar

Advisor on Women Development to  
His Excellency, The Prime Minister  
Government of Pakistan

Participants were divided into three working groups to identify key areas of concern, gaps and challenges and, priority areas for efforts and actions. The output of the working groups formed the basis for the outcome document, the Islamabad Declaration: Review and Action. The Islamabad Declaration was adopted by the delegates to the Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference.

The meeting concluded with the Governments of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives,

Nepal and Sri Lanka thanking the Government of Pakistan, in particular the Advisor on Women Development, Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, and appreciating the commitment shared by The Honourable, The Prime Minister, Mr. Shaukat Aziz, in his inaugural address, and the hospitality of The President, HE Gen. Pervez Musharaf, in hosting dinner for the delegates.

Dr. Girija Vyas expressed her appreciation of the hospitality shown to all delegates and the sharing that transpired in the meeting through a song, the words of which captured the spirit of the meeting.

Ms. Chandni Joshi and Dr. Noeleen Heyzer thanked all delegates for the enriching deliberations and ownership of the meeting and profoundly acknowledged the role of the Government of Pakistan in this meeting.



## Islamabad Declaration

### Review and Future Action

1. WE, Ministers, Secretaries and Senior Officers of the Governments and SAARC Secretariat, women's groups, NGOs, and researchers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan (invited as an observer state), gathered at Islamabad on 3-5 May 2005 at the Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference - "Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten" jointly organised by the Government of Pakistan and UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office.
2. This conference acquires a special significance since the year 2005 marks the tenth anniversary of the historic Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995, as well as the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration. We have all gathered in Pakistan after the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women to celebrate a 10-year journey of regional cooperation and learning, reviewing our progress and identifying current challenges and formulating a road map for future action.
3. While recalling and reaffirming the commitments for the realisation of women's human rights and gender equality made in the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, the Outcome Document of the Beijing Plus Five and the resolutions of the Beijing Plus Ten review at the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the substantive framework provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) ratified by all countries of the region, Security Council Resolution 1325 and all other relevant follow up documents adopted.
4. **We acknowledge developments in the following areas:**
  - (a) The formulation of national policies and action plans to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women
  - (b) Increased access to education for women and girls
  - (c) Establishment of national machineries on women and institutional mechanisms towards effective realisation of women's human rights
  - (d) Drafting new legislations and/or amending laws especially on violence against women, sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and children
  - (e) Emerging jurisprudence on women's rights
  - (f) Forging partnerships between Governments, women's groups, civil society and interest groups, elected representatives, the media and the private sector
- (g) Increase in women's access to economic opportunity, credit, and employment
- (h) Enhanced affirmative actions towards increasing women's representation in political decision-making at different levels
- (i) The adoption of policies on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care
- (j) Adoption of regional instruments such as SAARC Social Charter and the SAARC Convention on Trafficking.
5. We recognise the **gaps and challenges** in implementation in the following areas
  - (a) Inadequate implementation of plans, policies and programmes relating to women
  - (b) Lack of expeditious enactment of legislation and non-repeal and amendment of discriminatory laws
  - (c) Inadequate progress in meeting the commitments under Article 9 of CEDAW on gender equality in citizenship laws
  - (d) The feminisation of poverty and its further accentuation due to adverse effects of globalisation
  - (e) Inadequate progress in giving equal access to economic opportunity, land and livelihoods with dignity and personal security
  - (f) Continued prevalence of all forms of violence against women, including those in conflict situations
  - (g) Inadequate commitment, awareness, measures and resources to combat violence against women
  - (h) Inadequate attention to eliminating socio-cultural practices and mindsets that continue to discriminate and disadvantage women
  - (i) The increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women, particularly younger women
  - (j) Lack of gender sensitive policies and interventions to combat communicable diseases, anemia, TB, malaria, etc.
  - (k) Inadequate progress in achieving women's equal representation in national legislatures
  - (l) Inadequate and lack of gender-sensitive reproductive/ sexual health information and services and care to women
  - (m) Lack of sufficient male involvement and participation in promoting women's rights and substantive equality

- (n) Continued lack of gender perspectives in macroeconomic policies, trade negotiations, national budgets and investment decisions
  - (o) Inadequate reliable and relevant sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis at all levels
  - (p) Insufficient resource allocations, authority status for national machineries on the advancement of women, and their marginalisation
  - (q) The lack of regional cooperation and partnership initiatives to address problems of regional concerns such as trafficking in women and children, HIV/AIDS and promoting and protection of the rights of migrant workers
  - (r) The increasing vulnerability of women in marginalised groups
  - (s) The negative portrayal of women in the media
  - (t) Inadequate initiatives to address the needs and concerns of women in remote areas and in disadvantaged communities
  - (u) Inadequate progress in meeting and monitoring time-bound commitments.
6. **In light of the above, we agree to prioritize our efforts and actions on a two-year plan on the following areas:**
- (a) Violence Against Women (VAW)
  - (b) Economic empowerment of women
  - (c) Political empowerment of women
  - (d) Disaster preparedness and management; and,
  - (e) Health and Education.
7. **In pursuit of the above priorities we will:**
- (a) **Develop and strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equity and equality**
    - (i) Ensure sufficient resource allocations, authority and status for national machineries for women including women's ministries and national commissions
    - (ii) Ensure that mainstream institutions integrate women's human rights and gender concerns into their policies and programmes and, establish appropriate gender management systems
    - (iii) Repeal/amend discriminatory laws against women and initiate integrated efforts to implement laws
    - (iv) Ensure gender analysis of budgets and identification of allocations and expenditures at all levels needed to support women's advancement
    - (v) Promote men's and boys' participation in creating a gender just society
  - (b) **Ensure linkages between Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and MDGs as mutually complementary processes**
    - (i) Recommend to integrate the "Islamabad Declaration: Review and Future Action" at appropriate multilateral forums and through these emphasize integration of gender perspectives in the high level plenary meeting to review the Millennium Declaration and Goals
    - (ii) Recommend that CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action are integrated into national indicators and all other processes and the medium term development framework (MTDF) to monitor achievement of the Millennium Declaration and Goals.
8. **Eliminate Violence Against Women (VAW) and girls**
- (a) Ensure that international commitments under CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the Beijing +5 meeting are fulfilled in regard to elimination of violence against women.
  - (b) **Prioritize the following:**
    - (i) Law and administrative reforms and actions to address violence against women through health and other relevant initiatives
    - (ii) Ratification of the SAARC Convention on Trafficking by all member countries
    - (iii) Use existing research in law reforms, policy formulation and programmes and encourage further research
    - (iv) Reform of the criminal justice system to make it more responsive to violence against women and sensitization of the judiciary, the administrative and law enforcement machinery particularly the police and health professionals to violence against women
- (vi) Enhance and encourage corporate social responsibility
  - (vii) Further strengthen partnerships with women's groups and civil society organizations
  - (viii) Promote and strengthen gender sensitive media
  - (ix) Acknowledge and appreciate the positive contribution of UNIFEM in sustaining and carrying forward the Beijing process, advocating for women's rights in the region and lobby for sufficient resource allocations for the organization and appropriate status for it within the UN system.



- (v) Consider ratification of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.
- (c) Promote concrete actions - safety net support systems and leadership development, to address the reality of violence in women's lives which exposes, which inter alia, women to HIV/AIDS
- (d) Promote and strengthen gender sensitive community based interventions to address VAW
- (e) Check negative forces and strengthen civil society to promote zero-tolerance against VAW.

## 9. Economic Empowerment of Women

- (a) Provide adequate infrastructure to support women's economic opportunity, independence and livelihood that ensures dignity and personal security
- (b) Provide and strengthen adequate social security systems
- (c) Ensure that women's contribution is visible in the national accounting system
- (d) Protect the rights of women workers in both the formal and informal sectors and home-based work
- (e) Support women's right to own property and land, to inheritance, to equal access to credit, to be fully employed and to receive equal remuneration for work
- (f) Ensure the participation and voice of women in the formulation of macro and micro economic policies
- (g) Address the need to promote shared responsibility in care-giving roles in the family and prevent women from being overburdened by multiple tasks and responsibilities
- (h) Support and facilitate processes to engender global and regional trade agreements and treaties.

## 10. Political empowerment of women

- (a) Secure political will of the States, political parties and other actors, along with mechanisms for implementation of gender-sensitive electoral codes and legislation for affirmative actions for women in the legislatures and prevent any reversal or dilution of affirmative actions already taken
- (b) Work towards ensuring that women are directly, rather than indirectly, elected
- (c) Create an enabling environment to allow women legislators to participate in and contribute to the deliberations and decisions of the elected bodies of which they are members

- (d) Ensure greater representation of women as office bearers and candidates
- (e) Ensure gender analysis of budgets and identification of allocations and expenditures at all levels needed to support women's advancement in the political arena.

## 11. Emergency situations and disaster preparedness

- (a) Ensure women are at the centre of the rescue, relief and recovery efforts, and at all levels of decision making and planning in all types of natural disasters and conflict situations
- (b) Support and promote regional women's networks and ensure that the needs of women and realities of women's lives are reflected in national policies and actions through the phases of relief and recovery work and post conflict reconstruction
- (c) Work towards capacity building of women and to ensure appropriate allocation of resources to deal with emergency situations.

## 12. Concrete Immediate Actions

- (a) Propose that in the next two years, the SAARC gender database housed at the SAARC Secretariat is organised, resourced and equipped to address the full range of challenges on sex-disaggregated data and is able to share best practices from the region on gender equality;
- (b) Incorporate SAARC and country-level indicators for the MDGs that reflect commitments made under Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW
- (c) Agree to meet, discuss and review progress on the Islamabad Declaration: Review and Future Action at the annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women with the assistance of UNIFEM
- (d) Agree to hold six monthly meetings of Secretaries of national machineries of the member states and to address the issues of trafficking of women and children and review of the "Islamabad Declaration: Review and Future Action" to be sponsored by the UNIFEM
- (e) Agree that civil society groups of the region will participate in the public hearings being organised by the UNSG on MDGs to give their inputs in the formulation and expansion of indicators relating to MDGs
- (f) Each government will develop a plan based on this document with time-bound goals and targets within the two-year time frame and share it within the region
- (g) A website to be created to share information.

AF	Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation	MWCSW	The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare
BD	Beijing Declaration	MRR	Maternal Mortality Rate
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association	NAP	National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action	NASSCOM	National Association of Software and Service Companies
BPL	Below Poverty Line	NCBP	NGO Coalition on CEDAW and Beijing Process
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics	NEC	National Education Commission
CC	Concluding Comments	NEMAP	National Environment Management Plan
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	NGOs	Non-government organizations
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child	NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
CSW	Committee on the Status of Women	NIPFP	National Institute of Public Finance and Policy
CTF	Country Task Force	NSS	National Sample Survey
DDC	District Development Committee	PAP	Poverty Alleviation Programmes
DDS	Deccan Development Society	PES	Post Enumeration Survey
DWCD	Department of Women and Children Development	PFA	Platform for Action
FP	Family Planning	PLDP	Participatory Livestock Development Project
FTZ	Free Trade Zone	PREP COM	Preparatory Committee
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women	PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
FWLD	Forum for Women Law and Development	RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women
FWPR	Female Work Force Participation Rate	RH	Reproductive Health
GDB	Gender Database	RMP	Rural Maintenance Programme
GDI	Gender-related Development Index	RPD	Regional Programme Director
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure	SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
GMS	Gender Management System	SAK	Stree Aadhar Kendra
GRAP	Gender Reform Action Plan	SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
HDI	Human Development Index	SARO	South Asia Regional Office
HE	His/Her Excellency	SAWAK	Women's Consultative Group (Bhutan)
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	SHG	Self-help Groups
HPSP	Health and Population Sector Programme	SMEDA	Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of Maldives	STI	Sexually-transmitted Infections
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights	TFR	Total Fertility Rate
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
ICT	Information and Communications Technology	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ILO	International Labour Organization	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
ISST	Institute of Social Studies Trust	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
IT	Information Technology	UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
ITPA	Immoral Traffic Prevention Act	VAW	Violence against Women
JIT	Joint Initiatives Against Trafficking	VDC	Village Development Committee
JMS	Jatiyo Mahila Sangstha	VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals	WSIS	World Summit of the Information Society
MIM	Monitoring Index of MDGs	WTO	World Trade Organization
MGFDSS	Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security	GADMIS	Gender and Development Management Information System
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MTEF	Medium-term Expenditure Framework		
MWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs		

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**PROGRAMME**  
**Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference**  
**Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten**  
**At Islamabad, Pakistan, 3-5 May 2005**

**3 May 2005**

10:00 – 12:30	<b>Inagural Session and Cultural Programme at the Convention Hall</b> Welcome Address by H.E. Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Adviser to the Prime Minister Address by H.E. Mr. Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji, SAARC Secretary General Key Note Address by Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM, New York Inaugural address by H.E. Shaukat Aziz, Prime Minister of Pakistan
12:45 – 13.45	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>SESSION I</b>	
13:45 – 14:55	<b>Chair – Government of Pakistan</b>
13:45 – 13:50	Modalities of the meeting
13:50 – 13:55	Film – ‘The Power of Doing’
13:55 – 14:10	‘Our journey since Beijing’ by Ms. Chandni Joshi, RPD UNIFEM
14:10 – 14:40	Presentation on Progress of South Asian Women 2004 by Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)
14:40 – 14:55	Discussion
<b>SESSION II</b>	
15:00 – 16:30	<b>County Presentations– Bangladesh, Bhutan</b> <b>Chair – Government of Maldives</b>
15:00 – 15:35	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Bangladesh</b>
15:00 – 15:15	Presentation by the Government of Bangladesh
15:15 – 15:25	Response from civil society
15:25 – 15:35	Discussion
15:40 – 16:15	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Bhutan</b>
15:40 – 15:55	Presentation by the Government of Bhutan
15:55 – 16:05	Response from civil society
16:05 – 16:15	Discussion
16:15 – 16:30	<b>Tea Break</b>
<b>SESSION III</b>	
16:30 – 17:30	<b>Paper Presentation on “Gender, Livelihoods and Resources”</b> <b>Chair – Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy</b>
16:30 – 16:50	Presentation on “Gender, Livelihoods and Resources” by Dr. Govind Kelkar
16:50 – 17:30	Open discussion
<b>SESSION IV</b>	
17:30 – 18:45	<b>Country Presentations – India, Maldives</b> <b>Chair – Royal Government of Bhutan</b>
17:30 – 18:05	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: India</b>
17:30 – 17:45	Presentation by the Government of India
17:45 – 17:55	Response from civil society
17:55 – 18:05	Discussion



18:10 – 18:45	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Maldives</b>
18:10 – 18:25	Presentation by the Government of Maldives
18:25 – 18:35	Response from civil society
18:35 – 18:45	Discussion
19:30	Dinner hosted by Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director UNIFEM at “Marquee Hall”, Marriott Hotel

#### 4 May 2005

9:00- 9:10	Summarizing the previous day’s proceedings
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#### SESSION V

9:10 – 10:45	<b>Panel discussion on “Women’s representation, leadership and effectiveness”</b> <b>Chair – Government of India</b>
9:10 – 9:25	Presentation by the Government of Afghanistan and discussion
9:25 – 9:45	Presentation on “Women’s representation, leadership and effectiveness” by Ms. Khawar Mumtaz
9:45 – 9:55	Presentation by a Parliamentarian from Pakistan
9:55 – 10:05	Presentation by a Municipal level Representative from India
10:05 – 10:15	Presentation by a District level Representative from Bangladesh
10:15 – 10:25	Presentation by a village level Representative from Nepal
10:25 – 10:45	Discussion

#### SESSION VI

10:50 – 12:00	<b>Country Presentations – Maldives, Nepal</b> <b>Chair – Royal Government of Bhutan</b> <b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Maldives</b>
10:50 – 11:05	Presentation by the Government of Nepal
11:05 – 11:15	Response from civil society
11:15 – 11:25	Discussion
11:25 – 11:40	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Nepal</b>
11:40 – 11:50	Presentation by the Government of Nepal
11:50 – 12:00	Response from civil society
12:00 – 12:15	<b>Tea Break</b>
12:15 – 12:50	<b>Country Presentations – Pakistan, Sri Lanka</b> <b>Chair – Government of Bangladesh</b>
12:15 – 12:50	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Pakistan</b>
12:15 – 12:30	Presentation by the Government of Nepal
12:30 – 12:40	Response from civil society
12:40 – 12:50	Discussion
12:50 – 13:25	<b>Commitments, Action Plans &amp; Challenges: Sri Lanka</b>
12:50 – 13:05	Presentation by the Government of Pakistan
13:05 – 13:15	Response from civil society
13:15 – 13:35	Discussion

13:35 – 13:55	Presentation by Mr. Kesang Wangdi, Director SAARC on the SAARC Gender Data Base
13:55 – 14:30	<b>Lunch</b>

#### SESSION VII

14:30 – 16:00	Panel discussion on “The Varied Contours of Violence” Chair – Ms. Salma Khan
14:30 – 14:50	Presentation on “The Varied Contours of Violence” by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy
14:50 – 15:00	Intervention by discussant – Dr. Shalini Bharat
15:00 – 15:10	Intervention by discussant – Ms. Sapana Malla Pradhan
15:10 – 15:20	Intervention by discussant – Barrister Zafarullah Khan
15:20 – 15:45	Discussion
15:45 – 16:00	<b>Tea Break</b>

#### SESSION VIII

16:00 – 17:40	Sharing and Learning Session on Monitoring mechanisms and tools – MDGs, PRSPs, and CEDAW indicators Chair – SAARC Secretary General
16:00 – 16:10	Presentation by Ms. Salma Khan on CEDAW as a monitoring mechanism
16:10 – 16:20	Presentation by Prof. Savitri Goonesekere on CEDAW Indicators
16:20 – 16:30	Presentation by Ms. Bandana Rana on using media & ICT for the advancement of women
16:30 – 16:40	Presentation by Mr. S.K. Nath on Monitoring MDGs
19:30	<b>Dinner and cultural programme hosted by the Government of Pakistan at the Presidency</b>

5 May 2005

Chair – His Majesty’s Government of Nepal

9:00 – 9:10	<b>Summarizing the proceedings of the previous day</b>
9:10 – 9:20	Presentation on engendering the PRSPs – Prof. Mahmuda Islam
9:20 – 9:30	Presentation by Mr. Shyam Sunder Sharma on Linkage between CEDAW, BPFA and MDG
9:30 – 9:50	Discussion
	<b>Chair – Government of Sri Lanka</b>
9:50 – 10:40	Group work on key regional concerns and priorities for action
10:40 – 11:15	Reporting back: presentations by groups
11:15 – 11:30	<b>Tea Break</b>

#### SESSION IX

11:30 – 13:30	Concluding Session Chair - Hosts
11:30 – 12:45	Presentation, discussion and adoption of “Islamabad Plan of Action”
12:45 – 13:00	Closing remarks by Delegates
13:00 – 13:15	Vote of Thanks by Government of Pakistan and UNIFEM
13:15 – 14:30	<b>Lunch</b>
13: 15 – 13: 45	<b>Press Conference with Heads of Delegations, SAARC Secretary General &amp; UNIFEM</b>

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