

The Impact of the Crisis on Women: Main Trends across Regions

About this Series

The Impact of the Crisis on Women is a series presenting different perspectives on the impact of the crisis on women and women's rights. The first 10 Briefs were commissioned by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), presenting sub-regional analyses from women's rights experts, activists and gender advocates. These briefs were produced in early 2009 and will be reviewed in mid-2010 in order to assess further impacts and new data available two years after the start of the crisis. Upcoming briefs also in the series will examine the intersection of women's rights, development, global governance and the current multi-dimensional crisis.

About this Brief

Brief 11 presents the main trends emerging from a cross-regional analysis of the impact of the crisis on women's rights. Both the similarities across regions – as well as the differences – are drawn out. For an in-depth analysis of the issues addressed in this brief, please see AWID's background paper "Cross-Regional Analysis on the Impact of the Crisis on Women and Women's Rights," by Cecilia Alemany, Graciela Dede, Natalie Raaber and Anne Schoenstein.

***BRIEF 11. The Impact of the Crisis on Women:
Main Trends Across Regions***

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1 Introduction: The Crisis is Systemic and Multidimensional

The present financial crisis and economic recession are intertwined with crises of food, energy, water, the environment, work and care; underscoring the systemic nature of the crisis. This crisis has affected not only economic life, but also the political and social institutions of society. While crises are far from new – indeed, much of the East and South have been in crisis for the past three decades – the current financial crisis has further aggravated these existing crises and, as a result, threatened the meager development gains of the last ten years.

The food crisis has been ongoing, with rising prices (linked to a complex array of factors ranging from climate change and weather, to the demand for biofuels sparking price speculation on key products) making even the most basic goods unaffordable for many. Competition for oil, natural gas and other energy issues are prominent on the international agenda, defining much of the geopolitics around other key issues related to security (for example: nuclear weapons ownership and development). The current global energy crisis – coupled with recurrent disasters and humanitarian crises produced by hurricanes, floods, desertification and rising sea levels – is raising the urgency of addressing pressing environmental problems.

The living conditions of the poor, already negatively impacted by the dramatic rise in food and energy prices in 2008, have worsened. Due to the crisis, advancement has slowed or completely reversed in such areas as hunger eradication and poverty reduction.¹ Indeed, the crisis is expected to result in between 73 and 103 million more people remaining poor or falling into poverty compared to pre-crisis estimates.²

Moreover, the world's poorest countries are unable to protect their citizens from the crisis, with an estimated 43 out of 48 low-income countries incapable of providing a pro-poor government stimulus.³ This context is further complicating efforts to deal with existing social crises, such as HIV/AIDs and growing levels of all forms of violence.



¹ Alberdi, I. (2009) "The World Economic and Financial Crisis: What Will It Mean for Gender Equality?" Speech given at the Fifth Annual Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament, Vienna, Austria, 13 July 2009.

² AWID (2009) "The impact of the crisis on women in Central and Eastern Europe," by Ewa Charkiewicz, p.3.

³ World Bank (2009), "Migration and Development Brief 11," World Bank, Washington, D.C., United States, available at:<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:21122856~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html>



Impacts of the Crisis have Strongly Gendered Dimensions

The distinct impact of the crisis on women versus men varies across countries.⁴ The overall and women-specific effects of the crisis will depend not only on gender job segregation in each country and the existence of social protection nets, but also on the characteristics of each country in relation to, for example, dependence on remittances, trade, levels of foreign direct investment and overseas development aid. A country's level of international reserves, its currency strength, current account deficit and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, will also play a role in shaping the impact of the crisis.⁵

43 out of 48 low-income countries incapable of providing a pro-poor government stimulus.

While much research and analysis is still underway to fully comprehend the impacts of the crisis, anecdotal evidence to date and insights from past crisis experiences indicate that existing structural inequalities, including embedded gender inequality and the lack of adequate social safety nets, will mean that women – particularly poor and marginalized women, such as rural and indigenous women, migrant women, sex workers, queer individuals and women that are HIV/AIDS positive – will be impacted disproportionately by this crisis. The negative consequences often last for generations.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Yakin Ertürk, has also asserted that while the scale and impact of the current crisis is still largely unknown, it is expected that women and girls in both developed and developing countries will be particularly affected by job cuts, loss of livelihoods, increased responsibilities in all spheres of their life and an increased risk of societal and domestic violence.⁶

As a result of poorer nutrition, the health status of people living in poverty is likely to deteriorate. Women and girls – the first to cut back on consumption – will likely be hit harder than men and boys, impacting their right to health disproportionately. In terms of education, as national budgets tighten, national spending on education (often linked to improvements in enrolment) may drop. As poor families prioritize other activities (such as waged labor or unpaid domestic work) over

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization (2009) “The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2009: Economic Crises – impacts and lessons learned,” Rome, Italy.

⁵ AWID (2009) “The Global Financial Crisis and Women in West Africa: Developing Impacts and the Implications of Policy Responses,” by Dzodzi Tsikata.

⁶ Ertürk Yakin (2009) “UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women calls on women and men to unite in times of economic crisis,” 6 March 2009, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland

schooling; children, and particularly girls, from the poorest households, will be pulled from school or not sent at all.⁷ These actions lead to lower future income-earning potential, persistent poverty⁸ and increase the work burden for women through more care responsibilities.

Additionally, as government budgets shrink, funds available for social services and social security will diminish. When the state pulls back, women serve as a safety net, increasing both their paid and unpaid work to respond to the needs of their families.⁹ This double (or triple) burden of work, further threatens women's rights to equal access to education, healthcare and the labor market (amongst other areas).

Failure of the Neo-Liberal Model: An Opportunity for Alternative Visions Grounded in Human Rights

As Mariama Williams and Yves Conze state: “underlying [this] crisis is the pervasive and damaging effect of a corrosive fundamentalist economic and social ideology that premised the market and significant market actors as the key arbitrators of social and economic goods.”¹⁰ This model privileged the “right to do business” and profit maximization over the duties of the state to respect, protect and fulfill its human rights obligations. Based on the dubious assumption that wealth “trickles down” and that development can be measured simply by a country's GDP, liberalized international trade, foreign investment, macroeconomic stability and the “efficient” private sector are touted as the best means by which to achieve national development and wealth. In this process, little attention is paid to the impact of these actions on people's livelihoods or on the ability of states to fulfill international human rights obligations.

In addition to the limitations of the neo-liberal growth and development model, communities and individuals are faced with a narrow multilateral development agenda under the Millennium Declaration and the ensuing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have reduced many of the broader agendas and achievements of social movements enshrined in human rights conventions and standards. The geopolitical scene is also shifting at a rapid pace, giving shape to an unequal global governance system, which marginalizes the role of the UN in issues related to development, macroeconomics and trade.

⁷ United Nations (2009) “Report of the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty,” by Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, 11 August 2009, A/64/279.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ AWID (2009) “The Impacts of the Financial and Economic Crisis on Women's Rights in Eastern, Southern and Central Africa: Trends and Issues,” by Zo Randriamaro.

¹⁰ Williams, M. and Yves Conze (2009) “Towards A Gender, Development and Climate sensitive framework for exploring solutions to the present Global Economic and Financial Crises”.

Women's rights groups and progressive social movements have denounced the neo-liberal framework for decades. As many women's rights advocates and others have noted, the crisis is both an opportunity to raise old issues and critiques, as well as a space to bring forth new issues and alternative visions of development, many of which have been proposed and utilized by women and women's rights activists in their daily lives.

A Human Rights Approach to the Crisis: Its Basic Components

- Women's rights groups – and other civil society organizations – have been advocating for a more inclusive, accountable and democratic international system. A human rights based approach (which includes women's rights) to the crisis, offers a holistic and universally recognized framework for guidance in the design and implementation of economic, financial and other policies to address the crisis.¹ States must respect, protect and fulfill human rights obligations and ensure that responses to the crisis do the same.
- The duty to comply with human rights requires that governments create the conditions necessary for all to be able to fully exercise and progressively realize their rights. This, in turn, requires that the crisis be examined in a gendered manner, entailing, for example, that social reproduction – understood here as the work (both paid and unpaid), done overwhelmingly by women, that regenerates and sustains human life – be considered when making policy or investment decisions.²
- Additionally, a human rights approach to the crisis requires that governments ensure minimum essential levels of social and economic rights and that existing programs which protect infant and maternal health, provide food assistance, combat preventable diseases and malnutrition or ensure access to primary education, be protected.³ Non-discrimination and substantive equality are essential and disadvantaged members of society must be protected as a matter of priority.

¹ ESCR-Net (2009) "Statement on the Financial Crisis and Global Economic Recession: Towards a Human Rights Response," p. 2.

² AWID (2009) "Cross-Regional Analysis on the Impact of the Crisis on Women and Women's Rights," Background Paper, November 2009, by Cecilia Alemany, Graciela Dede, Natalie Raaber and Anne Schoenstein, p. 11.

³ ESCR-Net (2009).



The Impact of the Crisis on Decent Work and the Care Economy: A Vicious Cycle

The crisis has severely compromised the decent work agenda, pushing millions into unemployment, underemployment and/or precarious employment. In some sectors and regions, women comprise the majority of those affected by unemployment. Equally, when crises occur (and governments typically cut social spending), women perform an increasingly disproportionate share of unpaid social reproduction work. Unpaid work is invisible in macroeconomic policy and discussions, as well as in the majority of responses to crises. It is therefore crucial to highlight this aspect of women's work – and the overall crisis of care – on the ability of women to enjoy their human rights.

Pervasive Gender Inequality in Paid and Unpaid Work

Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue within the working world, comprised of both paid (market) work and unpaid (social reproduction) work. In the case of labor markets globally, women suffer multiple disadvantages including:

- gender inequalities in the division of productive labor and social reproduction labor;
- unequal access to and control of productive resources (particularly land, capital and labor);
- unequal remuneration and social security benefits; and
- unequal access to the labor market as a whole and higher unemployment rates.¹¹

Women also face constraints in terms of the sectors in which they work and the working conditions which they face.¹² In crises, these disadvantages are often exacerbated.

¹¹ AWID (2009) by Dzodzi Tsikata, p.2.

¹² International Labour Organization (2009) "Global Employment Trends for Women," March 2009, Geneva: ILO, p. 6.

The number of unemployed globally is likely to increase by between 24 and 44 million in 2009;¹³ this is estimated to push women's global unemployment rate to 7.3% and men's to 6.6%.¹⁴ It can also be expected that of those women who manage to keep a job, earnings and other employment conditions will deteriorate.¹⁵ In addition to this, the number of working poor¹⁶ – more than half of whom are women – has risen as the effects of the crisis spread.

The number of unemployed globally is likely to increase by between 24 and 44 million in 2009.

Women Workers are Impacted Disproportionately by the Crisis

Comprising 60-80% of the workforce in the export manufacturing industry, women are the primary labor source for industries that have been heavily hit by the crisis in the South: textiles, electronics, domestic production and services.¹⁷ Additionally, women are often contracted in low-paid, low-skilled and temporary employment, making them particularly vulnerable in times of crisis.¹⁸

While both women and men are affected by job losses, women are often the first to be laid off. As formal sector workers are forced to the informal economy, already low wages are further depressed,¹⁹ disproportionately impacting women as the majority of those already in informal labor.

¹³ International Labour Organization (2010) "Global Employment Trends," January 2010, Geneva: ILO, p.47.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.46.

¹⁵ International Labour Organization (2009) "Global Employment Trends for Women," p.6.

¹⁶ Working Poor is defined as the proportion of employed persons living in a household whose members are estimated to be below one of the two international poverty lines (US\$1.25 or US\$2 a day).

¹⁷ Grown, Caren (2009) "Gender Dimensions of the Economic/Financial Crisis,".

¹⁸ Cited in ITUC (2009) "Jobs – the Path to Recovery, How employment is central to ending the global crisis," p.20.

¹⁹ Sirimanne, S. (2009) "Emerging issue: The gender perspectives of the financial crisis," written statement to the UN Commission on Status of Women, 53rd Session, 3-15 March 2009, New York, USA, p. 5.

Regional Snapshots

- The proportion of working poor in Latin America and the Caribbean – after decreasing from 27.7% to 15.3% between 1998 and 2008 – is estimated to have risen to 21.3% in 2009.¹ Within Trinidad and Tobago, trade unions discovered an emerging pattern where pregnant women are the first to lose their jobs. This action directly violates the Maternity Leave Act of that country.²
- Unemployment in Asia-Pacific could increase by between 3.2 and 14.5 million workers between 2007 and 2009,³ with the greatest employment impact in 2008 in the export-manufacturing sector, many areas of which are dominated by women.⁴
- Export processing zones have been the main providers of jobs for poor women in many African countries (e.g. Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Kenya, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia) and are characterized by their high level of job insecurity and particular sensitivity to economic recessions.⁵
- Within Southeast Asia, youth unemployment is a major challenge, with rates expected to increase from already high levels in some countries and differentiated along gender lines.
- In the last quarter of 2009, official unemployment in the US stood at 9.7% or 14.8 million unemployed persons.⁶ Parts of the country, particularly underprivileged communities, face unemployment rates exceeding 25%.

¹ International Labour Organization (2010) “Global Employment Trends,” p.46.

² AWID (2009) “Impact of the Crisis on Women in the Caribbean,” by Rhoda Reddock and Juliana S. Foster, p.6.

³ International Labour Organization (2010) “Global Employment Trends,” p.46.

⁴ International Labour Organization (2010) “Global Employment Trends,” p.56.

⁵ UN ESCAP (2009) “Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2009: Addressing Triple Threats to Development,” p. 13.

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) “News Release: The Employment Situation – January 2010,” Washington, DC: US Department of Labor.

The Care Crisis is Exacerbated by Current Economic and Financial Crisis

The “care crisis” has long preceded the current financial and economic crisis. How a society cares for its children, elderly and sick is the result of a balance between the provision of care by government, the market, the community (service) and the household.²⁰ Due primarily to the increased privatization of social services and its associated costs, the past 25 years have seen the burden of care continuously shift toward the household and, within that, women. As governments continue to reduce their role in the care economy, families and individuals hit by the crisis will find it increasingly difficult to afford care in the market.

Women will bear a disproportionate burden, as more and more care work shifts to the home and on women’s shoulders.²¹

The Care Economy

The care economy refers to “reproductive” work such as caring for, maintaining and developing individuals, families and communities, which constitute the “productive” labor force. It provides the basis for human life, the functioning of society and the “productive” economy. Care work keeps the labor force healthy and nurtured, and raises the future labor force. This work occurs primarily in the domestic sphere and is performed predominantly by women. Estimates show that the value of unpaid work can be equivalent to at least half of a country’s Gross GDP.¹ The care crisis is caused by states’ increasing deference, often a result of neo-liberal policies, of the costs of care to families and individuals – specifically and overwhelmingly to women. This privatization of care and care costs is exacerbated by the current crisis, as increasingly indebted governments cut social programs to balance their budgets – further increasing women’s unpaid care work.²

¹ Elson, D. (1999) “Gender-neutral, gender-blind, or gender-sensitive budgets? Changing the conceptual framework to include women’s empowerment and the economy of care,” in Commonwealth Secretariat, Gender Budget Initiative – Background Papers, London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

² Bakker, I. (2009).

²⁰ Hirway, I. (2005) “Integrating Unpaid Work into Development Policy,” Paper prepared for the Conference on “Unpaid Work and Economy: Gender, Poverty and Millennium Development Goals” organized at Levy Economics Institute, Bard College, New York, on October 1-3 2005.

²¹ Bakker, I. (2009) “The Global Financial Crisis and Care: Context and Gender Aware Responses,” in WIDE, “Report of the WIDE Annual Conference 2009, WE CARE! Feminist responses to the care crises,” 18–20 June 2009, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland.

If the economic crisis is to be fully understood from a gender equality perspective, the impact it has upon social reproduction must be examined.²² Yet, care work, by and large, remains invisible in macroeconomic models that determine economic and social policies. Indeed, governments have focused their responses to the crisis overwhelming on the “productive” sector. This obscures the gender-differentiated impact of the crisis and the additional burden many women must take on. This burden is further compounded by the continuous imposition of policy conditionalities on developing country governments by, for example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Such conditions typically require governments to cut back on public expenditure or privatize public services in order to reduce fiscal deficits with the above-explained effects on women.

3 The Impact of the Crisis on Trade: Women’s Sectors and Regional Impacts

One of the most immediate and direct impacts of the crisis on employment— particularly on women employed in export processing zones – has been through declining trade. Equally, trade is one of the key areas of transmission of the crisis – and indeed of the neo-liberal model of growth and development. Thus, it is important to underscore the pervasiveness of the impact that trade has on the ability of individuals to enjoy their human rights.

Trade: Both an Engine of Transmission and Key Area Impacted by the Crisis

Trade has served as one of the key channels of transmission of the crisis, contributing to its spread across the globe, and has had an immediate and direct impact on employment through declining exports. As noted by Aldo Caliari, “the weight that trade and trade-related channels bear as a conduit for the impacts of the financial crisis on developing countries is not surprising, [given that] developing countries have increased dependence on exports, especially since the late 1990s.”²³

²² King, R. and Caroline Sweetman (2009) “Gender Perspectives on the Global Economic Crisis,” OXFAM International Discussion Paper, February 2010.

²³ Caliari, A. (2009) “The Financial Crisis and Trade in Asia: Towards an Integrated Response in Asia,” Presentation at the UNESCAP Regional High-Level Workshop entitled “Strengthening the Response to the Global Financial Crisis in Asia-Pacific: The Role of Monetary, Fiscal and External Debt Policies,” Dhaka, Bangladesh, 27-30 July 2009.

According to the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN), free trade agreements (FTAs) or Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and financial services deregulation, were central to both the cause and rapid spread of the crisis.²⁴ Civil society groups and women's groups in particular have resisted the use of FTAs and EPAs, as their benefits are unevenly bestowed to stronger economies, with, at times, perverse affects for poorer regions, territories or producers.

Women's Employment in Export Processing Zones Lowers Dramatically

At the onset of the crisis, financial markets in the South were relatively less exposed to toxic assets due, in part, to greater regulation and oversight, than those in the North. As such, the impact of the crisis on the South was not felt primarily through financial markets, but rather through reduced demand in the North for products made in the South. Indeed, the WTO estimates that the decline in global demand in 2009 will result in an approximate 9% decline in the volume of exports.²⁵

As women have been active in some of the most important export sectors of developing countries, comprising as many as 80% of employees in the textile sectors, for example, lowered demand has disproportionately affected them.²⁶ Additionally, as exporters search for increasingly limited market space for their products, competition will intensify, resulting in further exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor, particularly female labor, in the least developed countries.²⁷ Trade finance – the money that helps fuel cross-border buying and selling – has also become increasingly expensive and scarce, further compounding the impact of decreasing demand.

Domestic subsidies, protective tariffs, and other trade barriers imposed by wealthy nations – while potentially beneficial to farmers (both men and women) located in the country implementing such measures – harm farmers, many of whom are women, in developing countries.²⁸ The liberalization of trade in agriculture, via export-oriented large-scale production, has further decreased

²⁴ AWID and UNIFEM (2009) "Highlights from the strategy meeting to follow-up efforts on aid effectiveness, gender equality and the impact of the crisis on women," 6-7 August 2009, New York, p. 2 and 21.

²⁵ World Trade Organization (2009) "WTO sees 9% global trade decline in 2009 as recession strikes," Press Release, 23 March 2009.

²⁶ UNCTAD (2009) "As trade declines from widening Global Crisis, meeting considers effects on Women's jobs, empowerment," Information Note, 10 March 2009.

²⁷ Rodríguez, G. (2009) "The Global Crisis Revisited," in IGTN Bulletin, Vol. 9, No. 2, Jan-Jun 2009, p. 2.

²⁸ ILO (2009) "Global Employment Trends for Women."

women small-scale farmers' already scarce access to credit, further exacerbating food insecurity.²⁹ Agricultural liberalization has also often meant that small-scale farmers find it impossible to compete in international markets. In other cases, women operating in import competing sectors and small-scale enterprises have also been unable to compete with foreign goods, thus losing employment.³⁰ This export-oriented production model, present in many developing countries, does not, generally speaking, produce decent jobs and its sustainability is strongly questioned by a broad number of women's rights groups and progressive movements.

The crisis has also had a negative impact on exporting countries' terms of trade, which has subsequently decreased government revenue flows and reduced employment. Mineral dependent economies in Africa – such as Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe – are prime examples of this.^{31,32}

Regional Trends in Trade – Some Examples

- In Central and Eastern Europe, lower demand from the euro area has mainly affected industrial production and exports of manufactures.¹ As revenue falls from declining exports – coupled with declining foreign investment and increasing costs of servicing debt – governments in Central and Eastern Europe are likely to fall into a new debt trap. For example, several countries (Hungary, Ukraine and the Baltic states) were on the verge of bankruptcy and required an IMF bail-out, increasing their debt and likely requiring restrictions on social expenditures.

¹ UNCTAD (2009) "Trade and Development Report 2009," New York and Geneva: United Nations, p. 38.

²⁹ Aguiar, D. (2009) "A gendered analysis on the global economic crisis – its causes and its multiple impacts," IGTN, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

³⁰ Williams, M. (2009) "Unlocking the Development Box: Markers Along the way towards a gender sensitive Development Agenda," A Preliminary Issue Paper, IGTN, October 2009.

³¹ Tsiko, Sifelani (2009) "Global Financial Crisis: Africa Bears the Brunt," Pan-African News Wire, 23 January 2009.

³² AWID (2009) by Zo Randriamaro, p. 5.

Regional Trends in Trade – Some Examples (continued)

- In Central Asia, the current crisis has diminished entrepreneurial opportunities that were once on the rise for women.² The decrease in trade and demand for exports has led to the reduction of textile production. As this industry is dominated by women, the reduction is disproportionately impacting women through increased job insecurity, a significant reduction in income, increased vulnerability to gender discrimination and a reduction in access to education and health services.³
- In Africa, declining demand and falling commodity prices – particularly in agricultural raw materials and minerals – have been damaging to Africa’s exports, which have been the main driver of growth since 2005. Moreover, vulnerability to the impacts of falling demand is heightened by the debt burden and dependence on aid of many African countries, combined with the damaging effects of political crises and civil conflicts in several countries (Zimbabwe, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, etc.).⁴

² AWID (2009) “Impact of the global crisis on women in Central Asia,” by Nurgul Djanaeva, p. 3.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ AWID (2009) by Zo Randriamaro, p. 1.

4

Rural Development and the Exacerbated Food Crisis

Rural development is intimately linked to food security and sovereignty, climate change and indigenous populations. Nevertheless, it has often been marginalized in development processes and practices. The majority of indigenous people live in rural areas. While they comprise only 4% of the world's population, indigenous people make up 33% of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people.³³

Indigenous people make up 33% of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people.

Rural livelihoods – which have already been battered by food insecurity, lack of social protections and climate change – have been further compromised by the crisis. As rural women are responsible for the bulk of food production and comprise the majority of working poor, women bear a disproportionate impact of the food crisis, itself exacerbated by the current financial/economic crisis.

The Economic and Financial Crisis has Exacerbated the Food Crisis

The economic and financial crisis has had detrimental effects on access to food, health and education for the most vulnerable groups in society, in particular those in rural and marginalized urban areas. In addition to declining incomes caused by the recession, the current crisis is marked by highly volatile commodity prices, including particularly high prices for food and agricultural inputs. The main causes for the surge in prices are government export restrictions, a weakening US Dollar and increased commodity speculation in the light of enormous excess liquidity globally.³⁴ This shows that the most recent spiral of hunger is not the consequence of poor global harvests, but rather the result of the interplay of crises rooted in the neo-liberal paradigm.

³³ IFAD "Factsheet on indigenous people," .

³⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization (2009) "Food Outlook December 2009," .

The Hunger Crisis

According to data from the FAO, 1.02 billion people do not have enough to eat. In 2006, 60% of those who suffered from chronic hunger were women.¹ This figure will likely increase as the crisis deepens. Almost all of the world's undernourished live in developing countries: in Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 642 million people are suffering from chronic hunger; in Sub-Saharan Africa 265 million; in Latin America and the Caribbean 53 million; in the Near East and North Africa 42 million; and in developed countries 15 million in total.²

An additional 41 million people in Asia-Pacific and 24 million in sub-Saharan Africa have plummeted into hunger due to the crisis. In the United States, more than 38 million people were struggling to put food on the table as of 2006;³ this figure has undoubtedly grown.

¹ World Food Programme (2009) "Hunger Statistics," Rome, Italy.

² Food and Agriculture Organization (2009) "1.02 billion people hungry: One sixth of humanity undernourished – more than ever before," FAO Media Centre, 16 June 2009.

³ Karl, M. (2009) "Inseparable: The Crucial Role of Women in Food Security Revisited," Isis International, WOMEN IN ACTION Series, No.1, p. 9.

The Recovery from the Economic Crisis Must Prioritize the Right to Food

The current crises have worsened the prospects in the fight against hunger. While programs exist to mitigate the negative impacts of the crisis in rural areas, they are minimal and meager. Cash transfer programs, for example, have been implemented with success in some countries, providing access to food for poor communities and helping to revive local economies.

Nevertheless, many countries face severe limitations to respond to a crisis of this proportion: lack of resources to invest and stimulate local economies, as well as a lack of institutionalization in the agricultural sector needed to increase agricultural production. In the case of rural women, these limitations are worsened by limited access to natural resources, resulting in increased food insecurity.³⁵

³⁵ Taken from an informal conversation between Alejandra Scampini and Marcela Ballara, gender focal person in FAO, Latin America and Caribbean office.

Women Among the Hardest Hit by the Food Crisis

Women's involvement in food production, distribution, procurement and cooking, places them at the frontline of rising food prices, exposing them to multiple forms of disadvantages. Rural women alone produce half of the world's food and 60% to 80% of the food in most developing countries, but receive less than 10% of credit provided to farmers.³⁶

Experience from previous crises suggests that already high infant mortality rates in parts of the world could increase, with girls more likely to be affected than boys.³⁷ Furthermore, while domestic food prices may eventually return to previous levels, the impact on poor households of the period of high prices will linger, potentially increasing school drop-outs (which are typically disproportionately borne by girls), delays in health care, violence, especially against girls and women, and sex trafficking.³⁸

It should also be noted, though, that although the price hike in food has negative effects on consumers, it can have positive effects on producers, particularly for women in the agricultural sector. However, female farmers face barriers such as lack of ownership and control over productive resources to benefit from production: women in Africa own 1% of the land,³⁹ and women in Latin America own 25%. Women of Central Asia currently face unequal access to economic and financial resources and decision-making – making it nearly impossible for women to benefit from production.⁴⁰

5 Migration and Remittances: Women Impacted on Both Sides of the Chain

As economies shrink due to the crisis, migrants have found it increasingly difficult to find/maintain decent work. In crises, as work diminishes, migrants – and particularly women migrants – face

³⁶ AWID (2009) by Dzodzi Tsikata, p. 7.

³⁷ UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP (2010) "Recovering from Economic and Financial Crisis: Food Security and Safety Nets," Background document to the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WF, January 2010, New York, United States.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Espey, J. (2009) "Food and Commodity Price Crises; Gendered Vulnerabilities and Social Policy Responses," Overseas Development Institute (ODI) presentation at the Oxfam Conference on Gender and the Economic Crisis, September 2009.

⁴⁰ AWID (2009) by Nurgul Djanaeva, p. 4.

deteriorating, increasingly precarious work conditions. Additionally, remittance flows, which comprise a significant portion of some developing countries' GDP, have fallen in the majority of the world, lowering household incomes and threatening already fragile livelihoods of poor people. Xenophobia has risen in certain areas, posing a serious risk to migrants' safety.

Women are Impacted as Migrant Workers and as Recipients of Remittances

Women constitute at least 50% of migrant worker flows from Africa and Latin America and up to 80% from parts of South and Southeast Asia.⁴¹ Economic downturn and increased competition in, for example, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, have increased the difficulty of migrants to find work, particularly in the formal sector.⁴² Remittance flows are estimated to decrease by more than 6% globally,⁴³ lowering overall household income and threatening livelihoods.⁴⁴ Therefore, migration as a coping strategy for poverty alleviation has, become less feasible.⁴⁵

Additionally, migrants, particularly women migrants, are often perceived as exploitable and expendable, a source of cheap, docile and flexible labor;⁴⁶ in crises, as work diminishes, migrants – and particularly women migrants – face deteriorating, increasingly precarious work conditions.

⁴¹ Alberdi, I. (2009) "The World Economic and Financial Crisis: What Will It Mean for Gender Equality?" Speech given at the Fifth Annual Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament, Vienna, Austria, 13 July 2009.

⁴² AWID (2009) "The impact of the crisis on women in Central and Eastern Europe," by Ewa Charkiewicz, p.3.

⁴³ World Bank (2009) "Migration and Development Brief 11," World Bank, Washington, D.C., United States.

⁴⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization (2009) "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2009: Economic Crises – impacts and lessons learned," Rome, Italy.

⁴⁵ AWID (2009) by Ewa Charkiewicz, p.3.

⁴⁶ International Labour Organization (2009) "The impact of the financial crisis on migrant workers," presentation to the ILO Tripartite Conference on Labour Migration for The Russian Federation and CIS Countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Moscow, 22-23 June 2009.

Snapshot – Statistics on Remittances

- Migrants' remittances are crucial for development and constitute more than three times the volume of aid (US\$317 billion in 2009) and can constitute a significant part of a country's GDP.¹ In the Caribbean – where 12% or more of Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica's national incomes are comprised of remittances² – the crisis has lessened the ability for migration to relieve the region's economic stresses.³
- The crisis has negatively affected remittance flows, which have decreased by 6.1% compared to 2008.⁴ As noted by Dzodzi Tsikata, “cuts in remittances to households are likely to heighten [other impacts of the crisis] ... in the face of rising prices of both food and non food consumer imports, many women and their families are facing not only reductions in food consumption, but also shortfalls in spending on a range of consumer items, education and health.”⁵
- Different regions are differently affected by the crisis. For example, throughout 2008, remittance flows to South Asia remained strong. On the other hand, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the Middle East and North Africa saw a reduction in remittance flows as migrant workers were unable to keep up their support for their families overseas.⁶ Tonga is an example where remittances comprise roughly 38% of GDP:⁷ as remittances fall, the lack of income for many families – especially in rural areas – compounds stresses for women in their daily roles.⁸
- “Tightening access to overseas labor markets for migrants is likely to affect Pacific women on temporary work visas such as caregivers and nurse aides in the health sector.”⁹

⁶⁵ World Bank (2009) “Migration and Development Brief 11”

⁶⁶ AWID (2009) “Impact of the Crisis on Women in the Caribbean,” by Rhoda Reddock and Juliana S. Foster, p. 7.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ World Bank (2009) “Migration and Development Brief 11”

⁶⁹ AWID (2009) by Dzodzi Tsikata, p. 7.

⁷⁰ World Bank (2009) “Migration and Development Brief 11”

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² AWID (2009) “Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Pacific Island women: A Snapshot,” by K. Sumeo, p. 3.

⁷³ *ibid.*

Snapshot – Statistics on Remittances (continued)

- In the Czech Republic, Czech officials are offering free air tickets and 500 Euros in cash to jobless migrants to encourage them to return home.¹⁰ In other countries – such as Tajikistan and the Republic of Moldova – where roughly 40% of GDP is comprised of remittances – the crisis has had a significant impact. 56% of Moldova’s migrants are women; as work has dried up in receiving countries, these women have been forced to return to labor markets that are unlikely to be able to absorb them.¹¹
- In some contexts remittance flows are even being reversed. For example, officials in Mexico noted a growing tendency among rural micro-banks where groups that had been receiving remittances were now sending funds to unemployed family members who had previously migrated to the US to help them survive the crisis and continue looking for further employment.¹²

¹⁰ AWID (2009) by Ewa Charkiewicz, p.3.

¹¹ United Nations Radio (2009) “Financial crisis impacts women’s progress in Europe,” Patrick Maigua interviews Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs Officer at the UN Economic Commission for Europe, 22 December 2009, Geneva, Switzerland.

¹² González, Susana (2009) “Se revierte flujo de remesas; familias de migrantes les mandan dinero a EU,” La Jornada.

6

Violence Against Women: On the Rise in Times of Crisis

Despite the growing recognition that violence against women is a public health concern and a violation of human rights, posing an enormous challenge to development, violence continues to have an unjustifiably low priority on the international development agenda.⁴⁷ In crises, violence against women increases, threatening livelihoods and eroding human rights, including women’s ability to participate fully and equally in society. Women living in conflict and post-conflict situations – already facing higher levels of insecurity and violence – typically see rises in times of crisis.

⁴⁷ World Health Organization (2005) “Addressing Violence Against Women and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals,” Geneva: WHO.

In times of hardship, women and girls are exposed to a greater risk of violence.⁴⁸ As food and fuel prices increase – adding stress to families – incidents of violence against women increase. Additionally, infant mortality is rising in this crisis in a gender differentiated way.⁴⁹ A World Bank policy brief reports that while boys and girls typically benefit equally from sudden upturns in per capita GDP, sudden downturns are much more harmful to girls than to boys: “a one or more unit fall in GDP increases average infant mortality in the ratio of 7.4 deaths per 1,000 births for girls and 1.5 deaths per 1,000 births for boys.”⁵⁰

The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has underscored the impact of the crisis upon the full-realization of human rights of women and girls worldwide. Amongst other likely effects of the crisis on women, the Committee identified potential increases in societal and domestic violence against women.⁵¹

A May 2009 survey of more than 600 domestic violence shelters in the US found that 75% reported an increase in women seeking help since September 2008, when the economic downturn was most clearly beginning to be felt in that country. Another troubling trend includes an increased risk of trafficking in women.⁵² The 1997 East Asia financial crisis serves as an example: increased trafficking of women through the Northern Chinese border as well as heightened domestic violence against women were reported and, in South Korea, an estimated one in seven women were involved in the sex trade a year after the crisis.⁵³

Insecurity and violence in conflict and post conflict situations – already high – typically rises in times of crisis. The poor and the vulnerable, particularly poor women and children, are impacted disproportionately.

⁴⁸ The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Pillay, N. (2009) “Statement to mark International Women’s Day,” 6 March 2009, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁴⁹ United Nations (2009) “Report of the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty.”

⁵⁰ World Bank (2009) “The Global Financial Crisis: Assessing Vulnerability for Women and Children”.

⁵¹ United Nations Press Release, 6 February 2009.

⁵² Deen, T. (2009) “Food Crisis To Impact Women and Children Heavily,” IPS, 30 April 2008.

⁵³ Child Rights Information Network (2008) “Violence: Tackling violence against women and girls: High in rhetoric, low in practice?” London, UK

Violence in the Pacific and in Brazil

According to Amnesty International's 2009 report, there is an increase in sexual exploitation and physical violence to women in certain nations within the Pacific as economies worsen. Forced prostitution of females is also alleged to be increasing in port areas, logging company locations, and in rural areas.¹

In the case of Brazil, those who are most affected by socio-economic inequality, particularly Brazil's afro-origin population, are also most likely to become victims of violence, especially lethal violence. Statistics show that Brazilian woman with the greatest risk of being killed by their partner are not only "poor", but also "young" and "black".² Accompanying this is an increased risk of exposure to sexual diseases. Historically in times of economic crisis, funding for basic services in health, education, and other anti-violence supports for women have been treated as expendable and are often among the first to be cut, leaving women without these crucial safety nets.

¹ Amnesty International (2009) "Amnesty International Report 2009: The state of the world's human rights," London UK: Amnesty International.

² National Movement of Street Boys and Girls (MNMGR) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) (2009) "Brazil The Criminalisation of Poverty: A Report on the Economic, Social and Cultural Root Causes of Torture and Other Forms of Violence," in Right to Food and Nutrition Watch: Who controls The Governance of the World Food System? published by Brot für die Welt, Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and FIAN International.

7

Moving Forward: Calling for a Human Rights- Based Alternative for Development

The impacts of the present systemic crisis on women and the enjoyment of their rights are varied and depend upon the diverse and specific realities of a given woman's context and circumstance.

Addressing the areas of impact identified within this brief – categories that, in real life, are neither separate nor distinct – requires a clear vision of development grounded in human rights and gender equality, robust political will and a strong public policy response, with regional coordination in those places where states do not have the capacity to overcome these challenges by themselves.

Strong attempts by women's rights groups and other social movements to address the global imbalances and systemic causes of poverty and inequality have been repeatedly undermined by those who stand to benefit from the existing economic model.

Stimulus packages, recovery plans as well as economic and financial structures and global governance mechanisms should be gender sensitive and promote women's rights. In order to achieve this, responses should be in line with human rights obligations. Responses should also integrate the perspective of a variety of women's rights groups in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and should, at the minimum, invest in care, community-based services, education, health, gender budgeting initiatives and in women's political leadership; they must also take into account women (and men) in all their diversities, including sexual diversity.⁵⁴

The current systemic crisis calls for a global recognition of the importance of women's participation in macroeconomics. Women are not simply passive subjects of macroeconomic policies; they are political and development actors in their own right and should, therefore, be substantially involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of macroeconomic policies.

While devastating, the crisis provides an opportunity to promote an economic model that is grounded in human rights and is inclusive, accountable and sustainable. Women's rights activists, gender equality advocates and feminist economists should participate in its creation. Ensuring and promoting the rights of all women is crucial to the construction of a new development model that benefits all, including those that have historically been subject to discrimination.

⁵⁴ AWID (2009) "The Impact of the Crisis on Women in West Europe," by Wendy Harcourt, p.2

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