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GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

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**EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO GENDER
AND DEVELOPMENT**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

Women in the Asian and Pacific region have been impacted strongly by the changing economic environment characterized by globalization, liberalization and the introduction of new technologies. The promotion of women's economic empowerment has become a central issue in the region in the light of the persisting feminization of poverty and of the changing economic landscape in which women's work has been undergoing massive shifts. Crucial to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is the elimination of violence against women. The Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, presented at the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, makes a number of recommendations for strengthening the effort to eliminate violence against women.

The present document raises some of the emerging gender issues facing the region with regard to women's economic empowerment. It addresses the impact of globalization on women, the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, and women and information and communication technologies. The present document covers some of the key findings and conclusions of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women and raises issues from the report that are of particular relevance to the region. The activities of the secretariat relating to women's economic empowerment and to violence against women are also addressed. The Committee is invited to deliberate on the issues raised in the present document and to provide guidance to the secretariat in terms of potential future work in these areas.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Women in the Asian and Pacific region have been impacted strongly by the changing economic environment that is characterized by globalization, liberalization and the introduction of new technologies.

2. The status of women in society and the progress towards achieving gender equality are strongly influenced by such aspects of economic empowerment as women's ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to own property, to be educated, and to participate in decisions within and outside the family. How women have fared in these areas in recent years shows that there have been economic opportunities created for women as well as economic adversities exposing longstanding underlying gender inequalities.

3. Despite the turbulence of the 1997 financial crisis, the region enjoys the highest growth rate in the world and continues to be a stronghold of economic dynamism. Yet the scope of poverty remains staggering. The region contains two thirds of the world's poor, with 40 per cent of the extremely poor who earn less than US\$1 a day living in South Asia and in the least developed countries of the region.¹ Women account for the bulk of the region's absolute poor.²

4. There has been increasing recognition of the gendered effects of poverty and their implications for hindering not only economic development but also the basic foundations essential to the development of a healthy society at the household, community, national and global levels.

5. Strong empirical evidence that correlates gender inequalities with retarded rates of development and economic growth is emerging. The World Bank has determined that "measures of gender equality have significant, positive effects on growth and thus on poverty reduction".³ The understanding of the multiplier and intergenerational benefits of improving women's welfare and status has increased.

6. Strong gender inequalities also exist in the region in the pervasiveness of violence against women. Violence against women is a gross violation of human rights. The Secretary-General has stated that, "as long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace".⁴ The preparation of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, in response to a mandate of the General Assembly, is a clear indication of the importance that Member States attach to addressing violence against women.

7. The region remains marked by strong gender divisions that are evident in societies, social relations, economies and power structures. While there has been some progress in reducing gender

¹ ESCAP, *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2006* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.10), p. 33.

² ESCAP, *Advancing the Status of Women in Asia and the Pacific: A Profile of the ESCAP Region*, 2004, p. 3.

³ World Bank, "Integrating gender into the World Bank's work: a strategy for action", January 2002.

⁴ Taken from a statement made by the Secretary-General on 9 October 2006, when the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women was released at United Nations Headquarters.

inequalities, these inequalities continue to proliferate among countries of the ESCAP region as the product of socially constructed power relations, norms and practices.

8. The present document addresses a number of the emerging and persisting gender issues in the region with regard to both women's economic empowerment and violence against women, and examines how to strengthen the regional effort to achieve gender equality in these areas. It seeks to identify fresh approaches and solutions to resolve entrenched gender inequalities that permeate the societies, infrastructures and value systems of the Asian and Pacific region.

9. The Committee is invited to deliberate on the issues raised in the present document, to make recommendations and to provide guidance to the secretariat in terms of future work in these areas.

I. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON WOMEN

10. The pace of the integration of the Asian and Pacific region into the global economy has been one of the most rapid in the world. This process of globalization and liberalization has been underpinned by the strong participation of women in the labour force. While there have been massive shifts of women into the paid workforce, at the same time, they have assumed a large share of the workforce vulnerability resulting in part from globalization.⁵

11. There has been increasing recognition that the rapid economic expansion experienced in the region, especially in East Asia, was fueled by export growth, which relied greatly on women's paid labour. The peak of this process occurred from 1980 to 1995 in the high-exporting economies of East Asia and South-East Asia, where the women's share of employment in export processing zones and in export-oriented manufacturing is estimated to have exceeded 70 per cent.

12. The use of women's labour, or the feminization of employment, was driven to a great extent by women's availability as cheaper and more flexible sources of labour. With the need for firms to find cost-efficient ways to remain competitive in the global market, there has been an increase in the level and share of female paid employment in many developing countries, as women are hired by multinational enterprises.

13. Because large numbers of women work in casual, part-time or piece-rate employment, they are a more "flexible" source of labour, and this created the "labour market flexibility" essential to maintaining competitiveness. The perception of women as more tractable employees who are more willing to accept lower wages and less prone to organize into unions further contributed to this flexibility in the labour market.⁶

⁵ Jayati Ghosh, "Globalization and the economic empowerment of women: emerging issues in Asia", prepared for the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes, Bangkok, 7-10 September 2004.

⁶ Ibid.

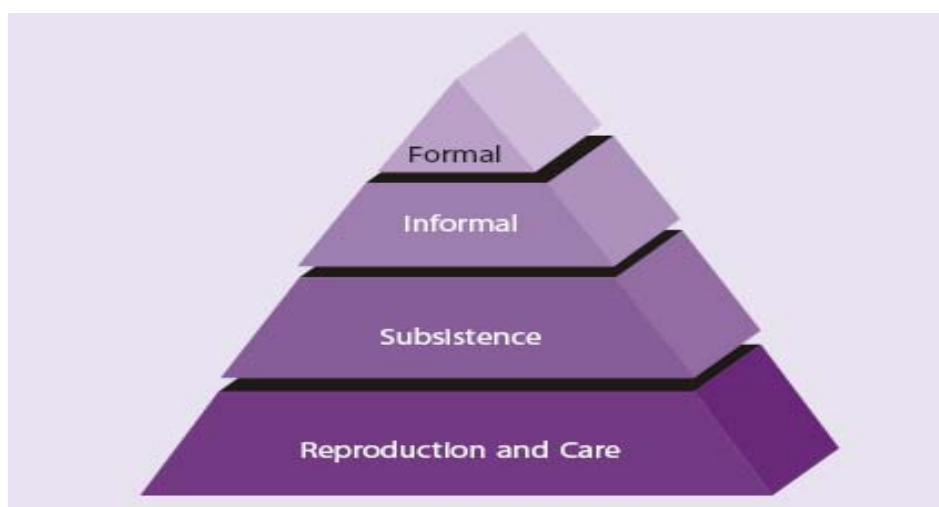
A. Women in the informal sector and the value of women's unremunerated work

14. The increasing recognition of the productive contribution of women to the dramatic economic boom in East Asia and South-East Asia up to the mid-1990s has helped to highlight the importance of valuing women's work. The role of women in paid, formal labour is only one of the many productive roles that women play in society, which has not often recognized the value of women's work.

15. This highlights, however, the need to broaden society's recognition of the value of women's work in the informal sector and at the household level, much of which remains unrecorded in the region's economies (see figure).

16. The participation of greater numbers of women in the formal economy has had both positive and negative effects on women. Under conditions of economic hardship, low-income women become increasingly visible as economic actors outside of the household sphere. At the same time, their societal roles often mean that women's burden of work in both the formal productive and domestic spheres is expanded. This is exacerbated particularly in poor households, where reductions in public spending result in more responsibilities and care work shifting to women and girls.

Figure. Women's productive and reproductive work



Source: ESCAP, *Gender Equality and Empowerment: A Statistical Profile of the ESCAP Region*, 2004.

B. Gender inequality and the increased vulnerability of women

17. Studies of the more rapidly growing Asian economies suggest that both economic growth and the growth of exports of labour-intensive manufactures have been most rapid in those countries that had the widest gender wage gaps. Discriminatory wage practices based on gender are common throughout the region.⁷

⁷ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.III.Y.1).

18. Due to household workloads, which predispose women to subcontracted work, including home-based work, women work in more flexible forms of employment and consequently often face poor and precarious work conditions.

19. The effects of the 1997 financial crisis show that women's gains in employment often may not be permanent and suffer backsliding, as was seen in the manufacturing sector, where, following the crisis, women experienced a decline in the share of paid employment.⁸

20. A financial and economic crisis has differential impacts on female and male workers. During the 1997 crisis, women were often the first to lose their jobs due to their less secure employment conditions and to discrimination based on the "male breadwinner bias".⁹

21. In some cases, women's pay and work conditions are better in formal jobs in the export sector than elsewhere in the economy. There has been growing awareness of the low-skill, "dead end" nature of these jobs, however.

22. There has been an increasing shift towards more capital-intensiveness in manufacturing industries. Women working in low-skill labour-intensive industries face difficulties in moving to jobs in manufacturing industries. The need to remain competitive in the world market has led to the widespread computerization of jobs, which women have long dominated, such as those in the textile industry and, increasingly, the garment industry, as well as data entry jobs in information processing. There have been strong repercussions on low-skilled women workers. As women generally have less access and fewer opportunities to upgrade their skills than men, these lower-skilled women are particularly vulnerable to becoming unemployed.

23. During periods of slow growth or recession, the likeliness that women will suffer unemployment more than men leads to greater numbers of women becoming self-employed or working in the informal sector. The work conditions of the self-employed and of those working in the informal sector are often precarious, and workers have neither benefits nor ample social protection.

C. The need for increased social protection for women workers

24. There is a need for greater government expenditure on social protection for all workers, in particular for the female labour force in the formal and informal economies made vulnerable by liberalization measures. As previously described, the factors combining to make women particularly vulnerable and in need of greater social protection are numerous and include: increased employment insecurity in situations of economic volatility, high labour turnover in global flexible markets and the predominance of women in informal work.

⁸ Ghosh, op.cit.

⁹ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.III.Y.1).

25. Reductions in public spending resulting from budget constraints and economic volatility and recessions have adverse effects that impact women and men differently. Due to the traditional pattern of sharing responsibility in raising a family, women are responsible in household management, including many health and hygiene concerns and care work.

26. Reductions in public spending increase the burden on families, in particular on women. There is an increase in the demand for women's time and unpaid caring functions and in the financial pressure on them to cover many expenses related to childcare, including medical services and education.

27. The increasing privatization of social services has implications for women. This trend places a further burden on women who frequently bear the burden of managing household budgets on less income and with fewer essential services. There is a need for a comprehensive gender analysis of the implications for women of such privatization. There is also a need to develop social policies that can help to alleviate the burden on women and ensure gender sensitivity in such measures.

28. In its resolution 59/2 of 4 September 2003 on strengthening social safety in the Asian and Pacific region, the Commission emphasized the importance of fostering an integrated social safety net, particularly the necessity of establishing a social safety net which provides necessary assistance to the unemployed, the poor and senior citizens as well as other vulnerable groups.

29. Under the ESCAP project entitled "Social protection: gender responsive health and social security for the elderly", a regional workshop was held in September 2006 to develop the capacity of Governments to analyse national fiscal and macro-socio-economic policies and legislative and regulatory frameworks on social protection from the perspective of elderly women.

30. A closer examination of the gender dimensions of macroeconomic policy is needed in order to better identify specific impacts on women and to promote gender equality. It is essential to develop policies and programmes that mitigate the effects of women's increased vulnerability due to globalization and to ensure the provision of effective social safety nets and social protection for women workers.

II. PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE REGION

A. Women's entrepreneurship and economic development

31. Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises have been recognized as a crucial tool in promoting the economic empowerment of women while fighting poverty and gender inequality. They have been identified as engines of growth by many Governments, and many institutional and regional players promote them as part of a developmental strategy to create new jobs in developing countries and to drive innovation and economic dynamism.

32. These enterprises offer benefits that assist in poverty alleviation in rural areas and in rural development. In low-income countries in the Asian and Pacific region, the rural population accounts for more than 70 per cent of the total population. Despite a decline in recent decades, the proportion of employment in agriculture continues to account for over 50 per cent of total employment in the region. In a number of ESCAP member countries, the rural informal economy continues to provide the majority of employment opportunities, mostly for unskilled labour. Women's microenterprises and small subsistence businesses play a crucial role in the rural economy and in ensuring the survival of poor households.

33. Promoting women's entrepreneurship can increase their economic empowerment, which yields multiple benefits. Studies show that among those benefits are greater independence and self-assertion, the ability to stand up to abusive spouses and an increased likeliness to serve as role models in the community.¹⁰

34. Women's entrepreneurship has led to increased mobility among women, to the creation of networks of women previously confined to the home and to the building of women's solidarity.

35. Entrepreneurs who are women, youth or ethnic minorities have specific support needs when starting their own businesses. Among these, women entrepreneurs are the largest group.

36. Inequalities in access to capital, resources and government support create particular challenges for women entrepreneurs, who often cannot obtain loans for their businesses due to a lack of status and a lack of property rights. In the agricultural sector, women farmers have scarce access to agricultural resources and services for production due to gender inequalities, the double burdens of farming and family responsibilities, and a lack of social services and government programmes to support women.

37. Women entrepreneurs face unique barriers in entrepreneurship and often have different approaches to running their businesses than men do. Gender awareness in designing and delivering support measures targeted at female entrepreneurs is therefore essential.¹¹

B. Statistics on women's entrepreneurship in the region

38. The scarcity of official sex-disaggregated statistics on entrepreneurship in the region, in particular on women's entrepreneurship, makes it difficult to assess the situation of women's entrepreneurship. Stronger government initiatives in data collection on women's entrepreneurship are an important step towards having a greater analysis of women's entrepreneurship and its impact in the region and on economic development.

¹⁰ Norman MacIsaac, "The role of microcredit in poverty reduction and promoting gender equity: a discussion paper", Canadian International Development Agency, 1997.

¹¹ European Commission, "Promoting entrepreneurship amongst women", Best Report No. 2, Brussels, 2004, p. 20.

39. According to the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2006*,¹² small and medium-sized enterprises account for more than 60 per cent of formal sector employment in most developing countries in the region. In Thailand, more than 86 per cent of the labour force is employed by small and medium-sized enterprises. In the Republic of Korea and in Viet Nam, more than 70 per cent of the labour force is employed by such firms.¹³

40. Although the mapping and regional assessment of women's entrepreneurship in Asian and Pacific countries is made difficult by the scarcity of data, micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises appear to be one source of work that concentrates large numbers of the region's working poor, many of whom are women. In the formal sector, women appear to head approximately 35 per cent of registered small and medium-sized enterprises.¹⁴

41. The actual number of women in the economic production sphere is likely to be even larger than the number stated in official records due to the large number of women working in the informal sector and for subsistence businesses, where the fine line between subsistence activities for the household and formal entrepreneurship becomes blurred.

42. A number of small-scale surveys done in the region provide some information on women's entrepreneurship:

(a) According to Chinese official statistics, the majority of Chinese women work in collective enterprises, most of which are small and medium-sized enterprises. It has also been reported that women initiate approximately 25 per cent of new business start-ups;^{15,16}

(b) In the Philippines, women constituted more than half of the self-employed individuals working in manufacturing and trade and up to 70 per cent of those working in social/community or personal services;¹⁷

(c) In Japan, four out of five small-business owners are women;¹⁸

(d) In Viet Nam in 1997, four out of five restaurants, cafes, hotels and wholesale retail shops and garment and leather manufacturing enterprises were owned and run by women.¹⁹

¹² ESCAP (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.10).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *E-Commerce and Development Report 2002* (UNCTAD/SDTE/ECB/2), chap. III, 2002.

¹⁵ Ghosh, op. cit.

¹⁶ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *E-Commerce and Development Report 2002* (UNCTAD/SDTE/ECB/2), chap. III, 2002.

¹⁷ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.III.Y.1).

¹⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *E-Commerce and Development Report 2002* (UNCTAD/SDTE/ECB/2), chap. III, 2002.

¹⁹ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.III.Y.1).

C. Effective approaches for promoting women's entrepreneurship

1. Women and microcredit schemes

43. In the informal sector, microcredit schemes that support women's entrepreneurship have led to successes and increased insights into the household dynamics and effective public practices for promoting women's entrepreneurship. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh pioneered microcredit schemes, and its success led to the effective promotion of women's economic empowerment.

44. Numerous studies have demonstrated that there has been a rise in incomes and in other measures of the standard of living as a result of women's entrepreneurship through microcredit schemes. It has been found that lending to women tends to have a strong multiplier and intergenerational effect because women pass on the benefits to their children by increasing their spending on household, education and nutritional needs.²⁰

45. It should be noted that while promoting women's entrepreneurship can be a highly effective means to empower women economically, continued macroeconomic policy reform is needed in order to address structural inequalities that perpetuate the disadvantages that women must endure.

2. Improving the business and regulatory environment for women entrepreneurs

46. A large number of women's businesses tend to be microenterprises composed of up to five people and started primarily as subsistence businesses to supplement the family income. In this form of business, women have little in the way of legal rights, status or recognition. They also lack access to vital capital and resources. An important part of the development of women's entrepreneurship consists of helping their enterprises to become profitable.

47. Complex, cumbersome and expensive regulatory requirements, often involving lengthy licensing processes and increased costs to business operations, can discourage entrepreneurial activity. This particularly affects micro- and small enterprises, and especially those in rural areas, where women's businesses tend to be located.

48. There is a need for a greater analysis of the impact of these regulations on women's microenterprises, in particular on those of rural women, with regard to such areas as business licensing, the allocation of land for commercial purposes, taxation, inspections and trade regulations. Entrepreneurial awareness programmes for women, particularly in rural areas, are also needed in order to reach women who may not be aware of their legal rights or of the administrative processes involved in legally formalizing their business.

²⁰ Maclsaac, *op. cit.*

3. Entrepreneurship development programmes for women and women's entrepreneurship networks

49. Business development programmes that provide women entrepreneurs with technical training, advisory services and information are important in order to strengthen women's entrepreneurial skills, competence and knowledge.

50. Increasing amounts of research are also finding that "women-centred spaces" are an effective way of strengthening women's entrepreneurship capacities. These spaces are women-only or women-friendly environments, such as women-only vocational training that has been developed considering women's needs.²¹

51. The women-only approach has been found to be extremely effective in many cases because of the safe and supportive environment that it creates. It may also account for the effectiveness of women role models and women's networks of solidarity in supporting entrepreneurship.

4. Grass-roots capacity-building for women's entrepreneurship

52. Supporting local level women's self-help groups to develop their own collective capacities and to advocate for policies favourable to women's entrepreneurship is a crucial component in ensuring the sustainability of the initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship.

53. By forming self-help groups, women entrepreneurs can undertake initiatives through a cooperative effort that would not be feasible individually, and channel their collective strength. These initiatives include collective marketing, bulk purchasing, group lending and creating shared facilities.

54. Although only a few key approaches are covered in the present document, it is important to promote women's entrepreneurship through multiple approaches.²² In the light of the rapidly changing global landscape, more comprehensive work in developing effective methodologies for promoting women's entrepreneurship, both at the policymaking level and at the grass-roots level, are needed. There is a need for stronger national measures and the exchange of best practices to identify how Governments can more effectively promote and support women's entrepreneurship.

D. The secretariat of ESCAP and the promotion of women's entrepreneurship and gender equality in the region

1. Promotion of women's entrepreneurship

55. The secretariat is currently implementing a multi-country project to establish sustainable e-businesses and a network for green cooperatives for women in rural communities. The project specifically targets women's entrepreneurship in agricultural cooperatives and enables them to capture a niche market in "green", or organically grown, products.

²¹ Wendy Faulkner, *Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society, Final Report* (Edinburgh, Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society, 2004).

²² United Nations Industrial Development Organization, *A Path out of Poverty: Developing Rural and Women Entrepreneurship*, Vienna, 2003 (available at www.unido.org/en/doc/13220).

56. As part of the project, the secretariat, the Asian Development Bank, the International Telecommunication Union and the Asian Pacific Women's Information Network Center co-organized an international workshop on entrepreneurship and e-business for women. The workshop was held in Seoul in July 2006. In this connection, two guidebooks are scheduled to be published by late 2006: one on the development of women's entrepreneurship in agricultural cooperatives in the region and another on the development of e-business among rural women in green cooperatives in the region.

2. Gender mainstreaming in national policymaking

57. The secretariat subscribes to gender mainstreaming as the key strategy for achieving gender equality. As part of the effort to promote gender mainstreaming in the Asian and Pacific region, the "Workshop on enhancing gender mainstreaming within ESCAP member countries' development programme" was co-organized by the secretariat and the Government of Indonesia, and held in Jakarta in December 2005.

58. Participants in the workshop exchanged ideas, experiences and good practices on gender mainstreaming, and stronger links and partnerships between the gender mainstreaming work of the United Nations and the efforts at the national and regional levels were established. The workshop facilitated a constructive and practical dialogue on capacity-building among the 14 participating countries from across the region and adopted a set of recommendations to guide the follow-up actions of the participating countries.

3. Beijing follow-up activities

59. Gender mainstreaming in policymaking and anti-poverty strategies continues as part of the role of ESCAP in linking governmental, regional, United Nations agency and civil society stakeholders. The role of ESCAP in the regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action²³ is to implement follow-up activities.

III. WOMEN AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

60. With globalization and the rapid proliferation of new technologies, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been transforming the work environment, with strong implications for women and for the promotion of women's economic empowerment. ICTs have emerged as a key tool in assisting women and communities in the rural sector and in fostering rural development.

61. Having identified new technologies as potent drivers of development and socio-economic growth, many countries in the Asian and Pacific region have embarked on ambitious programmes to build ICT infrastructure and transform themselves into knowledge societies. The gender dimension of ICTs needs be integrated into the development of these national ICT programmes in order to ensure

²³ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. 1, resolution 1, annex II.

that women benefit equally from the new technologies and to ensure the awareness of both the positive and potentially negative impacts of ICTs on women.

62. ICTs are transforming the way business is done, and in the process they are providing women with new employment opportunities. In recent years, large numbers of women have been employed in new areas of work created by the new technologies, such as teleworking and information technology enabled services (ITES). ICTs offer greater opportunities to women small-business owners that make their businesses competitive in the global market.

63. ICTs are being increasingly integrated into social service delivery systems administered by Governments and by the private sector. This is creating a new e-sector of social services, such as e-health and e-education/learning, where strong work and economic empowerment opportunities exist for women.

A. Emergence of information technology enabled services and the impact on women

64. The rise of ITES has created new opportunities for women in such areas as call centres, telework and teletrade. It is providing women with expanded markets for employment and enabling many women to work and earn a living from home. Women working in these formal-sector jobs are provided with the opportunity to escape unemployment, informal-sector work or other forms of livelihood, such as prostitution.

65. At the same time, the “back office” dynamic, or the tendency for women to assume jobs in low-skill, lower paid ITES work, has raised awareness that ICT opportunities can have negative aspects as far as women are concerned. ICTs can perpetuate old patterns of gender inequality with women being trapped in low-skill jobs that offer no prospect of advancement or skills training.

66. Since productivity in ITES, for example in call centres, is often measured by “the number of calls handled” and involves rigorous monitoring to ensure “quality levels”, work in many ITES environments is often highly stressful and characterized by a rapid “burnout” rate.²⁴

67. While teleworking offers women enhanced employment opportunities, it is important to counter the potentially negative impacts. Work in this field can perpetuate the invisibility of women’s work. It can deprive women of the important knowledge and skills development gained from a collective office environment, which also provides interaction and cohesion with colleagues. The isolating nature of telework can weaken women’s bargaining power with regard to worker’s rights, which tends to be stronger when workers bargain collectively.²⁵ It is important that ITES policies be developed to ensure women’s equality and human rights and that a healthy, safe working environment be guaranteed for women.

²⁴ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *E-Commerce and Development Report 2002* (UNCTAD/SDTE/ECB/2), chap. III, 2002.

²⁵ Cecilia Ng, “Teleworking and gender in the information age: new opportunities for Malaysian women?”, paper for the Regional Conference on Gender and Technology in Asia, Bangkok, 4-7 August 1998 (available online at www.apdip.net).

B. Information and communication technologies for women small-business owners

68. ICTs have opened up new opportunities for women as small-business owners. These businesses range from phone shops and Internet cafes to such business initiatives as those created through the Grameen Village Phone project, where women provide mobile phone services to customers.

69. The use of ICTs for marketing, e-commerce and e-retailing purposes offers strong potential for women's small businesses. ICTs are enabling women to tap into opportunities in local, regional and global markets. There are a number of success stories of women marketing their products effectively through the Internet.

70. The new forms of working and running businesses created as a result of ICTs are appealing particularly to women because they offer greater flexibility and capacity to combine work with family responsibilities. Women who were previously unable to access paid work due to the constraints of family responsibilities, geographical remoteness and other factors are able to run businesses thanks to the flexibility of ICTs.

C. The emerging e-social services sector and economic opportunities for women

71. The e-social services sector is an emerging area offering opportunities for women to become economically empowered. As it is a new area, it is important to examine the gender dimension in the development of initiatives and policies in this area.

72. Governments have been quick to comprehend the usefulness of ICTs and e-business in providing social services and in dealing with stakeholders. Many Governments in the region have initiated robust strategies to create e-service and e-business environments. It is important that women be integrated into this process.

1. Women and the e-health sector

73. The e-health subsector is an area of rapid growth in the e-social services sector. E-health appears to be emerging as a new "industry", joining others, such as pharmaceuticals and the medical devices sector.²⁶ Increasing numbers of countries are incorporating more telehealth and telemedicine into their national programmes. There has been much recognition of the usefulness of e-health in providing health services, particularly for those in remote rural areas.

74. As "guardians of family hygiene", women have a vested interest in the well-being and health of the family. Supporting women's entry into and participation in the growing e-health sector is an effective approach for promoting women's economic empowerment. Involving women in the

²⁶ Commission of the European Communities. "E-Health: making healthcare better for European citizens: an action plan for a European e-Health area", 2004.

development of e-health applications and infrastructure would not only strengthen women's role and status as health workers and professionals but also ensure that the development of e-health systems integrate the concerns of women and families. The participation of women in this sector can help to enhance the quality of life of families, rural development and the empowerment of women.

2. Women and e-learning

75. Education is another sector being transformed by ICTs. New ways of learning and teaching are being developed. E-learning can be a powerful tool for the economic empowerment of women by providing them with alternative and flexible means of obtaining a basic education, which is one pillar of economic empowerment. This can be an effective way to reach isolated rural women or homebound women with no opportunities for a formal education. E-learning appears to be of particular interest to women due to its flexibility, especially in terms of time (the "anywhere-anytime" aspect of e-learning).

76. It is important to support women professionals in their pursuit of careers specializing in e-education/e-learning. The proper design of e-learning software and materials for the Web can also play a key role in creating a comfortable e-environment for women. Most current course designs and educational materials for the Web are created by men.²⁷ The fact that primarily men design the materials and tools is not an indication of gender bias; however, the gendered perceptions of the designers may be reflected in the courses. Increasing the number of women in the design process can help to ensure the development of more effective e-learning materials for women.

77. Contrary to assumptions based on the lower number of women in information technology fields compared with men, recent studies show that women are not less responsive to ICTs than men. For example, Internet games, which are seen as a form of recreation preferred primarily by boys, were found to have considerable appeal for girls when properly designed.

78. Developing effective strategies for increasing the interest in and acceptance of e-learning among poor women is an important step towards women's economic empowerment. In the absence of formal education channels, informal learning and social and peer learning channels were found to be particularly effective in spreading ICT learning and integration among women and girls.

79. The discovery of ICTs by women and girls through informal peer channels was found to be a very powerful way of accelerating e-learning and the integration of ICTs among the poor. This is in contrast to a purely formal education route, such as classroom training only.²⁸ Greater research is needed to identify more effective strategies for spreading ICT literacy to women and girls, particularly in rural areas.

²⁷ Faulkner, op. cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

D. Challenges in the region relating to women and information and communication technologies

80. The gender digital divide, which keeps women from obtaining key ICT benefits that would feed their economic empowerment, remains a major issue. Unless addressed in national ICT policies, the increasing use of ICT applications can threaten to widen disparities in the way in which women and men experience, benefit from and are affected by the new technologies.

81. The lack of computer literacy, ICT training and access to ICTs among women puts them at a severe disadvantage when new technologies emerge. The increasing use of ICTs in the workplace for access to social services and for personal needs raises the danger that women will be excluded from these benefits.

82. In the workplace, ICT-related tools, including the Internet, computerized work processes and digital automation, are quickly replacing manual tasks and operating methods. It is clear that, in many parts of the region where e-services are becoming commonplace, the failure of women to adapt to new technologies will marginalize them not only in the workplace but also in their access to basic public services.

83. Women who are not provided with the education and training to adapt to the changing environment risk redundancy in their jobs. As trends in globalization show, low-skilled women are at the most risk when economic survival necessitates cuts in firms.

IV. IN-DEPTH STUDY ON ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

A. Introduction to the study

84. The secretariat would like to present to the Committee the conclusions and key findings of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1), presented at the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

85. The study was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 58/185 of 22 December 2003, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on all forms and manifestations of violence against women and, on the basis thereof, to submit a report, with the study as an annex, to the Assembly. The study and report were to include action-oriented recommendations, for consideration by States, encompassing, inter alia, effective remedies and prevention and rehabilitation measures.

86. The study incorporates inputs and contributions from 129 Member States, who included information on violence against women in their responses to the 10-year Review and Appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.²⁹ Forty-nine Member States provided additional

²⁹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

information in response to a note verbale of March 2005. Many of the 150 reports submitted by States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women³⁰ between January 2000 and December 2005³¹ included information on their efforts to prevent and address violence against women.

87. The content of the study is comprehensive. It provides an overview of the emergence of violence against women as a public concern and responsibility. It discusses the context in which such violence occurs; the causes, forms and manifestations of violence against women; and the consequences and costs of such violence. The study discusses data availability, the responsibilities of States and promising practices for addressing violence against women. The study concludes with recommendations for accelerating implementation and for enhancing action to prevent and respond to violence against women.

88. Various types of violence against women are addressed: (a) within the family; (b) in the community; (c) perpetrated or condoned by the State; (d) in armed conflict; and (e) within the context of multiple discrimination.

B. Relevance to the region

89. The study highlights a number of issues with particular relevance to the Asian and Pacific region and with strong implications for ESCAP member countries. It notes a number of harmful traditional practices prevalent in the region. Practices of son preference, expressed in manifestations such as female infanticide, prenatal sex selection and systematic neglect of girls, have resulted in adverse female-male sex ratios and high rates of female infant mortality in South and East Asia.

90. Violence related to demands for dowry — which is the payment of cash or goods by the bride's family to the groom's family — may lead to women being killed in dowry-related femicide. Small community studies have also indicated that dowry demands have played an important role in women being burned to death and in deaths of women labelled as suicides.

91. Domestic violence is also an area requiring greater attention in the region.

92. Crimes against women committed in the name of "honour" may occur within the family or within the community. These crimes are receiving increased attention, but remain underreported and under-documented. The most severe manifestation is murder — so-called "honour killings". The United Nations Population Fund estimated that 5,000 women are murdered by family members each year in "honour killings" around the world.

93. Trafficking is a form of violence against women that takes place in multiple settings and usually involves many different actors, including families, local brokers, international criminal

³⁰ General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979, annex.

³¹ See the relevant reports of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, issued as supplements to the Official Records of the General Assembly.

networks and immigration authorities. Trafficking in human beings takes place both between and within countries. The majority of the victims of human trafficking are women and children, and many are trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. Trafficking is an issue of major concern in the region.

94. The range of exploitative activities resulting from trafficking includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.³²

95. Measuring the extent of trafficking in the region has been difficult. Countries in Asia along with Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States are the most frequently mentioned countries of origin. Countries within Asia along with Western Europe and North America are the most commonly reported destinations for trafficking.

96. Violence against women in contexts of armed conflict is an area of serious concern and can have negative social and intergenerational impacts.

97. Violence against women in the context of severe stratification of social class is often manifested in high rates of sexual violence committed against women of lower social class by men of higher social class. In remote villages in areas of the ESCAP region, access to the body of a woman of a lower social class is considered the prerogative of the landlord of the village.

98. The region is home to large numbers of migrant workers. Because of their subordinate status both as migrants and as women, female migrant workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation and ill-treatment. The types of violence suffered by women migrant workers include: inhumane working conditions, such as long working hours, non-payment of wages and forced confinement; starvation; beatings; rape; and being forced into prostitution. Unskilled workers, particularly in domestic service, experience greater and different kinds of violence than other women. Migrant women may also experience intimate partner violence and their status as migrants may further curtail their access to escape routes, services and information.

99. For many women worldwide, the threat of violence exacerbates their risk of contracting HIV. Fear of violence prevents women from accessing HIV/AIDS information, being tested, disclosing their HIV status, accessing services for the prevention of HIV transmission to infants and receiving treatment and counselling, even when they know they have been infected. Studies show the increasing links between violence against women and HIV and demonstrate that HIV-infected women are more likely to have experienced violence, and that women who have experienced violence are at higher risk for HIV.

³² See the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, annex II, article 3 (a)).

100. While all forms and manifestations of violence against women require more attention, some have been especially neglected. The study notes key areas requiring enhanced attention. Among these, the study highlights that psychological and emotional abuse and violence can take different forms that need to be made more visible and explicitly addressed. Economic abuse and exploitation is also cited, including acts such as withholding of income, forcibly usurping women's wages and denying basic necessities. This is an area requiring greater visibility, especially in the context of growing female participation in the labour force around the world. More inquiry is also needed about the use of technology, such as computers and cell phones, in developing and expanding forms of violence. Evolving and emerging forms of violence need to be named so that they can be recognized and better addressed.

C. Recommendations of the study and follow-up activities

101. Ending violence against women must become a local, national, regional and global priority. The study proposes recommendations for six key areas for action at the national level, aimed at: securing gender equality and protecting women's human rights; exercising leadership to end violence against women; closing the gaps between international standards and national laws, policies and practices; strengthening the knowledge base on all forms of violence against women to inform policy and strategy development; building and sustaining strong multisectoral strategies, coordinated nationally and locally; and allocating adequate resources and funding.

102. The use of the news media and information technology is cited as an approach through which to combat violence against women. The study reports that the training and sensitization of journalists and other media personnel who report on violence against women is a promising practice as it can enhance the quality of reporting and contribute to increased awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of violence against women among the general public. The use of new information and communication technologies such as cell phones and the Internet can be good practice to disseminate information widely and allow interaction between stakeholders to counter violence against women.

103. Concrete recommendations are also directed at the international level with actions proposed at the intergovernmental level and within the United Nations system. They highlight, in particular, the role of the General Assembly in ensuring that meaningful follow-up and implementation is undertaken by different stakeholders. The recommendations constitute a clear strategy for Member States and the United Nations system to make measurable progress in preventing and eliminating violence against women.

104. In follow-up to the Yokohama Global Commitment 2001,³³ adopted at the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Yokohama, Japan, in 2001, the

³³ See A/S-27/12, annex.

Commission is currently implementing the project entitled “Commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Pacific: building the capacity of the Pacific Islands to adopt and implement the Stockholm Agenda for Action and the Yokohama Commitments to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth”.

V. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

105. Committee members are invited to discuss the issues raised in the report of the Secretary-General study and to inform the Committee of the situation with regard to violence against women in their countries. ESCAP members may wish to propose initiatives and actions for helping to combat violence against women in the region.

106. The secretariat, in collaboration with relevant international and regional organizations, aims to strengthen its contribution to the promotion of women’s economic advancement and the elimination of violence against women through a renewed focus on (a) raising awareness, (b) research and analytical work and (c) strengthening regional cooperation in this area.

107. The secretariat welcomes proposals from the Committee on how ESCAP could help to strengthen policy, as well as to foster regional dialogue, common understanding and consensus on issues pertaining to women’s economic empowerment and violence against women.

108. The Committee is invited to provide the secretariat with further guidance on future initiatives with a view to strengthening regional and global policy in order to promote the economic advancement of women and overall gender equality and to eliminate violence against women in the Asian and Pacific region.

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