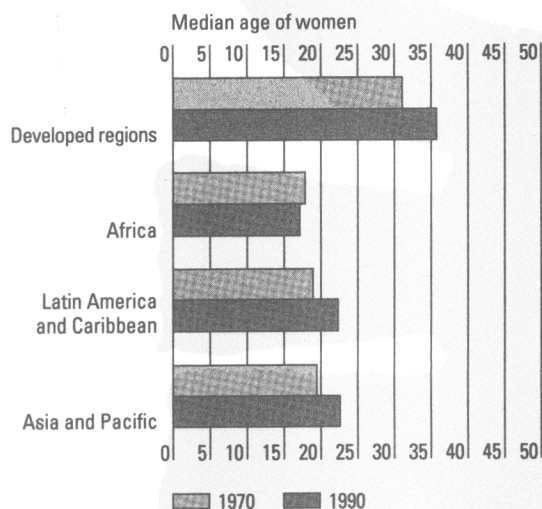


INTRODUCTION

All over the world, women's lives are changing. They are living longer, having fewer children and increasingly have a paid job, although very many of them are still living in poverty. These changes have been rapid, like an avalanche that changes the shape of the mountain, yet the cultural codes surrounding women's lives are only just beginning to change. Culture is, indeed, our best software for saving humankind from enslavement and violence. We must therefore readjust cultural codes so as to reflect the changing lives of women and, particularly, the changes in their life-stages. ¶ The childhood, adolescence, adulthood, motherhood and old age of women are all perceived and codified in different ways in diverse cultures. Yet economic, political and demographic changes are altering those stages and opening up opportunities for women to become involved in development and community life. Many questions can be asked about the process: How do women perceive the time they no longer devote to child care, since they are having fewer children? How are they contributing in new ways to their communities in their 'third age', since they live longer? How is adolescence perceived now that women are able to extend their education? How are the cultural codes concerning their work, whether paid or unpaid, being changed? ¶ Such questions will take a long time to answer in different cultures. We wanted to launch this process and accordingly organized a workshop on 'Cultural changes in women's life-stages', sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Society for International Development, which was held in Paris from 16 to 18 January 1995. ¶ The present report summarizes the fruitful and often surprising discussion that ensued at the workshop. The debate ranged from case-studies on the rapid cultural changes that women have experienced based on the participants' own research and history, to proposals on how to create new visions. The meeting searched for strategies to empower women to negotiate individually and as part of their community, and for better positions for women at the macro level of economics, culture and society. ¶ The participants tried to break new ground in order to push forward women's creative contribution to development policy and knowledge. ¶ The participants looked at how research could help to make women aware of their options for cultural and economic change. Participants argued that analysis and research reaching down to the roots of the fundamental structures of society would empower women and men to make their own decisions and

Shifts in women's demographic and economic position worldwide

The median age of women is rising rapidly everywhere except Africa



Note: Based on the total female population in each region.

Source: Prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from *Global Estimates and Projections of Population by Sex and Age: The 1988 Revision* (United Nations publication, ST/ESA/SER.R/93).

The workshop began by looking at the questions related to the trends in cultural changes in women's life-stages as a result of women's greater participation in the labour market, their enhanced life expectancy and the decline in their fertility. The decrease in the number of offspring, women's migration to cities and their increasing participation in the labour market have altered the stages at which they marry, have children and work for remuneration inside or outside the home. In many societies development has expanded the period of childhood and adolescence for young women and created new cultural expectations and practices. Nearly all the women in the world are becoming more aware of the number of children they are having and most of them are decreasing the number of their offspring and spacing births. Women's life expectancy too has risen. This has led to an increasing number of years in which they have fewer family duties, i.e. ten to forty years of their lives to devote to other activities.



"PROGRAMA UNIVERSITARIO DE
ESTUDIOS DE GENERO" - U. N. A. M.



The question of how women fill in this time has to be answered in the broader economic and social context of the changes in family structure and the globalization of the economy that has brought with it new forms of division of labour and new employment structures. How are women in the different world regions combining their family and their work roles? In the industrialized countries, growing unemployment may well prevent large numbers of young women from entering the work-force. What types of socially useful activity can these women turn to instead? In the newly industrialized countries, are women making the most of the increased opportunities for remunerated work in the new industries? How are they and their families coping with the sudden break in centuries old cultural codes which kept women segregated at home? In the less developed countries, will women living in dire poverty fill in the 'extra' non-reproductive years with just more back-breaking labour? Will women in countries undergoing economic transition find that they lose benefits such as child care in the new system, and how are they rebuilding their societies for democracy and a market economy?

The workshop began addressing these questions with a discussion on the implication of demographic shifts in general, proceeding by way of a series of national case-studies.



Motherhood (Italy). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Muro Alberto Pelliconi

Demographic shifts in women's life-stages

International fertility trends show that, whatever the low or high growth scenarios, there will most certainly be an unavoidable population growth. The mean age is also growing: even in a very high population growth scenario, there is ageing of the world's population with women outliving men in all but seven countries.

From these demographic trends we can conclude that women have more time than before to spend in non-traditional life situations (i.e. not as married mothers). The traditional family cycle concept – which split the female life-cycle into distinct stages of marriage, birth of first and last child and death of spouse – is no longer valid, since an ever-smaller number of women go through this cycle in Western society. In addition it is historically and culturally limited – non-Western societies have always presented a variety of patterns and in Western societies today women are experiencing a multitude of alternative life-cycles with a growing number of them single, divorced and/or childless. New ways of measuring women's life-cycle in terms of marital status, fertility and age set forth twelve different possible states. These new ways of measuring reveal that the predominant stereotype of women married with children is not verifiable. For example, in Austria only one-fifth of women aged between 15 and 50 follow the 'typical sequence'. Other factors that need to be taken into account in order to have a more useful demographic reflection of women's lives are women's participation in employment (labour force) and their educational levels. Marriage as a category also needs to be defined more realistically to take into account consensual marriages in many parts of the world; the cultural differences within any one nation need to be brought out rather than fused by demographic figures.

From the paper by Wolfgang Lutz



Sportive grandmother (Austria). Photo: UNESCO/Stuhlofer et Dusek

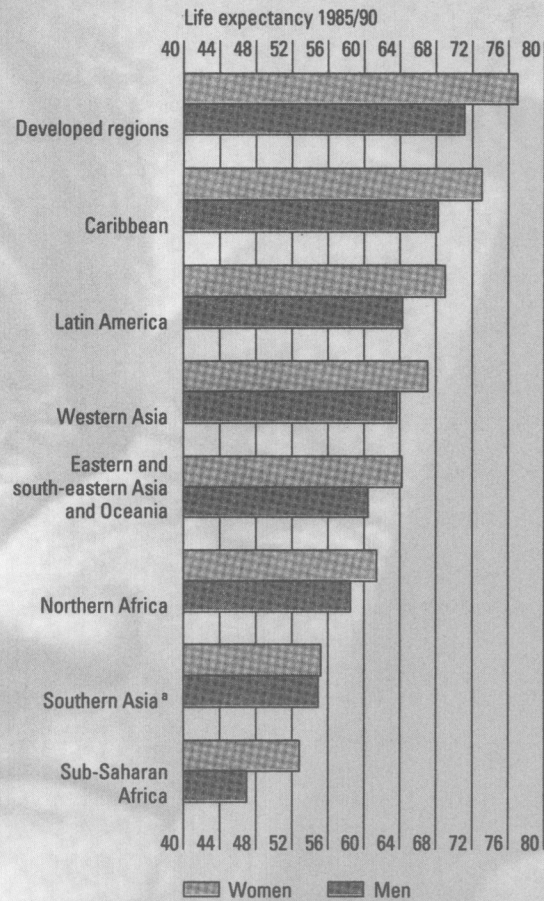
The Paris meeting focused on accounts of the conditions of women in various parts of the world today. The workshop contributed to the demographic analysis of and theoretical questions concerning the lived experience of women in their different demographic, economic, social and cultural contexts. A series of case-studies was presented sketching the cultural changes in women's life-stages.

Ghana

The situation of the majority of persons in Ghana is one of extreme poverty, with increasing tensions arising from rapid economic, social and political changes. Men and women have to strive together to face the problems of coping with stringency measures due to this structural adjustment. Despite this backdrop of increasing poverty, traditional attitudes towards women are changing and some observable broad shifts in women's cultural and social position in Ghana can be noted

From the paper by Miranda Greenstreet

Women live longer than men almost everywhere



Source: Averages for each region calculated by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from *World Population Prospects 1988* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.XIII.7).

^a Estimated life expectancy at birth is lower for women than men in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal.

Women's status has changed with a definite move towards a more equitable partnership with men and a greater range of life choices brought about not only by government policy but also by the women themselves in their networks of women's groups supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There is however still a long way to go with men not always adjusting well to the new status of women. At the macro level, women in Ghana continue to have little control over political and economic decisions, though the situation is changing gradually with the traditionally rigid gender division of labour breaking down. Women are now entitled to own property, yet men none the less continue to dominate political decision-making bodies, cash crops and commodity production. In Western Ghana, however, women still cannot own land.

In describing the shifts in women's life-stages, one should remember that Ghanaian women are not a single homogeneous group, and that class, ethnic origin and age should be taken into consideration. For example a mother-in-law in a traditional Moslem society has power over her daughters-in-law, whereas as a wife she has little power over her husband. In a traditional Ghanaian matrilineal system such as the Asante, women participate in clan decisions and even nominate the chief if they are from the royal house, whereas in other tribes women are seen but not heard.

Reproductive choice is increasing for women. Ghana has an active family planning programme. However, the reduction in children (total fertility declined from 6.4 in 1988 to 5.5 in 1993) has not necessarily given women more free time in either rural or urban areas. In rural areas women's workload does not seem to have decreased with the reduction in family size. The overall pressures of population growth combined with the economic crisis, environmental mismanagement and unsustainable agricultural practices have in fact led to even greater workloads. Due to rural-urban migration, women and old people are left without any means of subsistence and the increasing level of poverty means that even if children are still in the community they are not earning enough to support their parents. Women of over sixty continue to work in the fields because of dwindling support and poor wages. Children who once supported the mothers' work in the home and the fields are now at school, thus increasing women's labour.

Tenderness (Slovakia). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Vanco Milos



Urban educated women enjoy greater freedom, but the majority of urban women are poor and not highly educated, struggling to survive and meet payments for amenities such as water, electricity, education and health. Child care is a new problem for urban women who have to work outside the home with the breakdown of traditional family support systems not being adequately replaced by child care centres. Another shift is the number of female-headed households – over 30 per cent of the population – the majority living in poor and marginalized urban areas. Old age too is difficult for poor urban women who, with little family or government support, continue to eke out a living in petty trading.

The situation of Ghanaian women is mixed. Though they may enjoy ten additional years of life with a decreasing number of children and time devoted to child-bearing, growing poverty and rapid social and cultural changes have in many cases increased their work burden and led to family and community tensions and disorder.

China

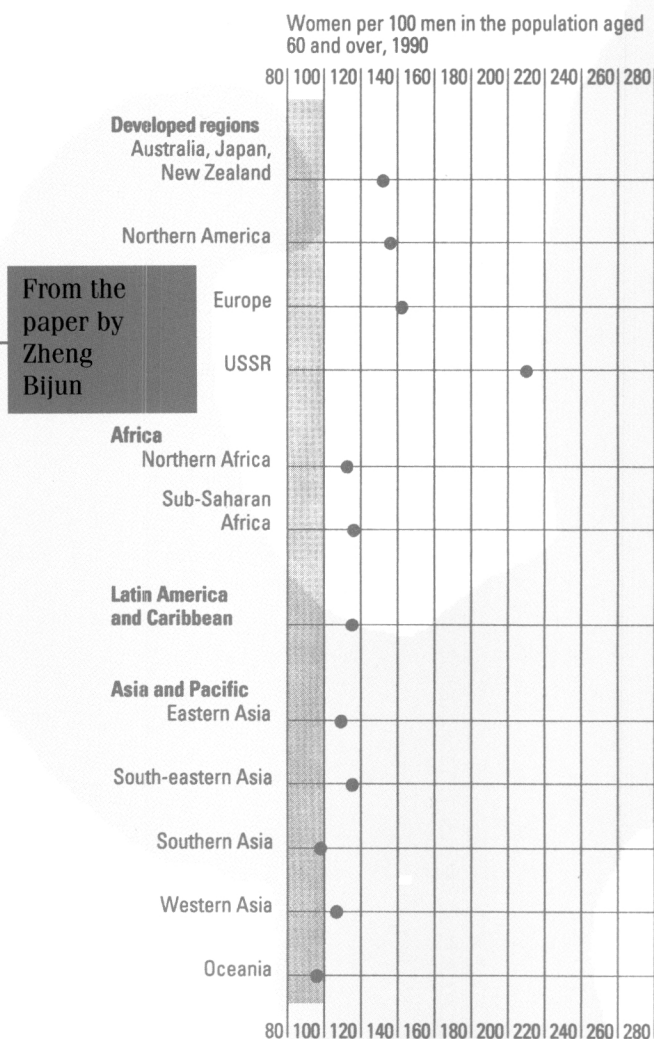
Since the late 1970s China has undergone an intense process of modernization, moving from a basic rural society towards an urban one where traditional peasant economies are being replaced by modern rural industrial enterprises. This has enabled women to put aside their traditional roles of housewife and mother and participate more actively in productive labour, bringing them to the forefront of modern social, economic and cultural change.

There are tremendous cultural and social differences between China's regions. However some general trends can be observed among young to middle-aged rural Chinese women. Since 1989 women constitute more than 40 per cent of the total number of rural employees. Women are educated alongside men as managers – constituting one third to one half of rural commercial and service industries. Women head 25 per cent of China's private industrial and commercial units. In Middle and East China, women contribute 50 per cent of the income of more than half the households. This active and indispensable participation of women in the workforce represents a huge shift from the past when rural women rarely travelled beyond a radius of a few kilometres from their homes during their entire life.

The industrialization of rural China has been accompanied too by increasing urbanization with many millions of country people moving into towns in order to work in the new factories and firms. This shift has been accompanied by an increase in the number of nuclear families, and a lessening of the traditional patriarchal familial values. Women have an independent income, thereby reducing their reliance upon families and husbands. The increase in commodity consumption (from 50.4 per cent in 1980 to 68.8 per cent in 1989; with an increase in foodstuffs from 31.1 per cent in 1980 to 52.3 per cent in 1989) has reduced rural women's housework burden and left them more time for educational and technical training. Radio and television schools have played an important role in allowing rural women to improve their education and training skills. However, professional and technical education is still needed in rural areas where girls continue to drop out of school. Two-thirds of China's 180 million illiterates are women: in North-West China there is a very low enrolment rate for girls, while two-thirds of children who leave primary school are girls.

Although young and middle-aged women on the whole have seen an improvement in their socio-economic situation, elderly women have failed to benefit from the modernization process. The illiteracy rate of rural elderly women is 90 per cent. Only 18 per cent of women

There are more elderly women than men almost everywhere



Note: Based on the total population of each sex aged 60 years and above in each region.

Source: *Global Estimates and Projections of Population by Sex and Age: The 1988 Revision* (United Nations publication, ST/ESA/SER.R/93).



Lovers (China). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Su Linzhong

Family planning is widely and successfully practised in China, notably among the urban educated class and young people in urban areas eager to benefit from economic growth. In rural areas, China's one-child-one-family policy is less practised, especially where the education level is low or not highly valued, and there is still strong male preference and a need for child labour. The tendency in these regions is to give birth to more than one child, especially if the first child is a girl, and to continue to use children for household and agricultural work.

The unique situation of women in China raises some interesting questions. Do the shifts in rural China from narrow traditional roles to women's greater education and participation in the labour force mean that the cultural perceptions of motherhood are changing? Does the process of modernization change the value of children and therefore the cultural values of motherhood? Do women themselves decide to have only one child or is it imposed by the government? Is the social value attached to fertility in rural China changing? What is the status of elderly women?



Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), a former Republic of the Soviet Union, is in the Arctic zone with eight months of winter. It has an area of 3 million km² and just over 1,5 million inhabitants. More than a third of the population are under 18 years. The main ethnic groups in the country are the Akakut, Russians, Ukrainians and various minorities. The national language is Yakut which is Turkish in origin. The main religion is shamanism, according to which the people believe in co-existence with nature.

From the paper by
Anastasia N.
Bozhedonova

Economically and demographically Sakha has undergone major changes in the last decade. The birth rate fell during the worsening economic conditions of 1985-93, while the mortality rate has increased from 7.7 per cent to 8.8 per cent, mainly in the mining region (the principal national product is diamonds). The marriage rate has fallen from 10.8 to 8.8 per cent and the divorce rate has increased from 4.4 to 4.8 per cent. The government has tried to stabilize birth and marriage rates in the last two to three years through a policy of increased social benefits and credit availability.

Since 1917 men and women have had equal rights, and this is borne out by the relative parity in education and professions. (However, equity is not necessarily the result of the revolution, as equality was also a feature of the country's hunting and gathering societies due to the men's long periods of absence.) There is no difference between the formal education provided to girls and boys. Some 85 per cent of women receive secondary education. Women's participation rate in higher education is impressive, with girls representing 55.7 per cent of university students. The superior educational achievements of women is due to girls' willingness to study harder than boys. In 1989 a survey showed that among highly skilled and specialized

Children of the steppe (Yakutia).

Photos: Fonds international Enfants Sakha-Asie



professions and educational institutions, women had achieved higher levels of education than men in professions such as education, finance, medicine and banking in particular.

Women also participate fully in economic activity. A 1993 survey showed that 35 per cent of women are workers, 42 per cent white collar workers, 4 per cent owners of companies, 6 per cent housewives and 6 per cent retired. Some 62 per cent are married, 16 per cent are divorced and 21 per cent single. Most women are obliged to work to maintain family living standards even if 65 per cent of the women feel that working conditions are bad and should be improved. A high percentage of the women would like to work part-time and be more actively involved in their children's education. (In particular this would enable them to teach them their ethnic language.). Child care is available in twenty-four-hour kindergartens, while other crèches have flexible time schedules.

Economic development has not freed women from household chores: women work twice as hard as men. Men spend most of their spare-time on leisure. The 1993 survey showed that in post-Communist society, women and men have equal rights but unequal positions in the household. On average, though women participate in the workforce, it is at a lower job scale and salary rate, while they own less property and devote more time to domestic matters. With the transition to a market economy, women are losing the support they used to get from governments and are having to adjust to a new period of economic stress and difficulty. The market has created new gender inequalities, e.g. more women are unemployed than men. The women's movement (which existed since the very first years of Soviet rule) is responding by forming associations of business women, mining women and mothers.

Women adjusted with some degree of success to the transition from the hunter/gatherer society to Communist rule and now to the market economy. It would seem that, with the current economic crisis, they now face a difficult period in terms of maintaining their rights to traditional cultural and family values.

Latin America

Since the Second World War, Latin America has undergone great economic, demographic, social and cultural transformations with the change from rural agrarian to urban society, rapid population growth and accompanying shifts in occupational and family structures.

Mortality began to fall in the 1940s, yet the birth rate did not fall until the 1960s with the resulting doubling of the population between 1950-1980. Accompanying the rapid population growth was a migration from rural to urban centres.

Between 1950 and 1990, the female labour force participation rates doubled. With the economic crisis of the 1980s, women entered the labour force to meet the rising cost of living and counter the fall in

To talk about the past (Colombia). Photo: E. Dulcey-Ruiz





Yes, I am your teacher (India). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/
Anavar M. Vhora

the wage-earning capacity of men. In poor households women are increasingly the major bread-winners. (Men's domestic responsibilities have not, however, increased.) This has led to women being able to assume more authority within families, though men still tend to dominate financial decisions. Single parent families are on the increase and some women are choosing to live alone – a choice that was at one time inconceivable. Family planning is becoming more acceptable, particularly among urban educated women.

Rapid economic growth based on export-led industrialization, changing demographic patterns and the mushrooming of urban centres has brought with it environmental problems that have to be considered along with cultural and economic processes. In the Latin American context, some interesting questions arise about the relationship between women and natural resource management: how do women migrants cope with the management of resources, water, waste, etc. ? Are women living in urban environments seeing the natural environment in a different way from rural women? What cultural knowledge of the environment has been retained in the urban context? Does education make women more or less aware of environmental changes?

Pakistan

According to a 1993 economic survey, Pakistan has a population of 120.84 million inhabitants (82.77 rural and 38.07 urban) with an annual growth rate of 2.9 per cent. Women make up 47.5 per cent of the population, i.e. one of the lowest sex ratios in the world. The fertility rate has declined from 8 to 6.2 per cent. Female literacy is a very low 22.3 per cent with rural female literacy at 11.3 per cent. The female labour force participation is officially around 13 per cent (it was only 3.2 per cent in 1981).

Culturally all four regions of Pakistan are marked by a high degree of gender segregation and rigidly defined gender roles in which women's place is in the home. All financial, economic, commercial and political negotiations outside the home are considered the male domain. Women and family honour are protected by the men of the family. Women are seen primarily as mothers and wives, dependants and financial liabilities. The majority of Pakistani women's education, mobility, health and nutrition is low and their access to resources and information extremely limited.

Changes are however taking place. Women's life expectancy has increased from 52 to 59 years in the last two years, they are conceiving fewer children, marrying later and participating in the formal and informal labour force in larger numbers (estimates are that in some areas of the informal sector up to 40 per cent of workers are women). As more women enter the work force due to economic pressures, their mobility is enhanced and their information levels improve.

The two most significant changes resulting from women's greater education and participation in the work force in both urban and rural areas

From the
paper by
Fauzia
Rauf

From the
paper by
Mercedes
Pedrero and
Margarita
Velázquez



Fondling (Pakistan). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Sayyed Nayyer Reza

The growing number of young and old people in the world strengthens the case for new approaches to community values and employment strategies.

the higher marriage age for women and the increase in the number of female-headed households. Marrying later gives women the opportunity to grow physically and mature before having to cope with child-bearing responsibilities. Working outside the home provides an independent income and a new level of freedom for women, accompanied by greater respect from their families.

In Pakistan it is clear that a widespread, rapid change is taking place that is challenging patriarchal ideology and structures.

New life-stages: adolescence and the 'third age'

The workshop identified two new stages that are emerging due to modernization and the demographic shift, i.e. the period of adolescence and what is now being called 'the third age'.

Traditional societies do not have a concept of adolescence. It belongs to a Western concept of the family where the period of childhood has stretched a number of years beyond puberty. Through the process of modernization, the concept of adolescence has now been introduced to other cultures. Whereas previously children were expected to be valued working members of the household, and puberty marked the threshold of adulthood (see 'Rites of passage' below), adolescence is now a period of extended childhood where young people acquire education and learning skills outside the home. Adolescent sexuality, once part of traditional 'early' marriage, is regarded as taboo and, if it occurs, is seen as contrary to social rules. The concept of adolescent mother or teenage pregnancy implies that a girl is 'too young' for the responsibilities of motherhood and is not yet a woman, even though a mother. Particularly in crowded urban centres where extended families no longer function, female adolescence is seen as an increasingly 'difficult' period with parents not able to 'control' their daughters. Education, including sex education, is considered as something outside the family and traditional cultural mores are being increasingly lost.

Adolescence

Adolescence, symbolized by the 'universal teenager' who wears (or at least aspires to wear) blue jeans and sneakers, drinks coca-cola and goes to discos, is seen as part of modern life. It is a period of undefined social responsibilities dividing childhood from adulthood. It is a new stage where young people are expected to learn about life but not experience adult needs. The adolescent girl is seen paradoxically as at once physically mature and attractive but also socially immature and in need of social constraints. The rapid social change experienced by most societies often means that these

perience, thereby leading to tensions within families and communities. The different generations are no longer sure of boundaries, responsibilities and how to interact with one another. Issues of identity and rights for the girl child have emerged as new issues in societies which had once considered young women as part of the patriarchal inheritance to be handed by the father to the chosen son-in-law at puberty.

The 'third age'

Another new life-stage that has recently emerged in every society, but particularly in the West, is the third age – the period of life from around 65 years. The demographic shift to longevity and reduction in childbirth has meant that women in almost all cultures have now from ten to forty more years to live beyond motherhood and often without partners as men do not live as long as women. During the workshop, Betty Friedan, author of 'The Feminine Mystique' and 'The Fountain of Age', drew attention to the implications of this additional one-third more of life for women, based on her research in the United States.

This period of extended 'grandmotherhood' has led to some necessary rethinking about women's social roles and life choices. Friedan argues that we need to think of old age in its own terms rather than as a period during which people are 'waiting to die'. She argues for the need to revolutionize Western thinking from seeing older people as a burden to seeing them as a source of strength and wisdom (an attitude more common in other cultures). There is a mystique about age, even more absolute than the feminine mystique which Friedan identified in the 1960s. Friedan discovered that only 5 per cent of Americans over 65 have syndromes of senility: many are healthy until well into their eighties. Rather than polarizing society into old versus young, she suggests that we need to look beyond current age divisions to new concepts of community and work that allow the skills of both old and young to be valued and strengthened in more strongly-bonded communities.

Although Friedan looks at age from the point of view of both men and women, she raised specific questions about the menopause. She noted that women who are socially and economically fulfilled as a rule do not 'suffer' from menopause, leading to the conclusion that if women were happily occupied as they enter a socially rewarding third age, many of the symptoms of menopause would not occur.

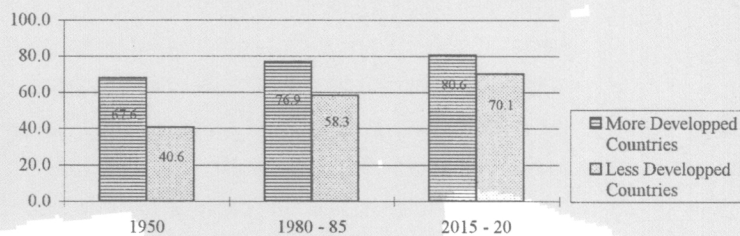
Learning from women's flexibility and caring

She also queried why women live longer than men. There are some physiological and habitual explanations. Men are more prone to certain diseases than women and because of childbirth, the latter are more in the habit of going to the doctor to check their health, and hence of picking up illness more readily. However there is also a psychological component. She noted that if a man's wife dies, he



Family get-togethers (Ghana). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Philip Boateng

Worldwide Evolution of Women's Life Expectancy at Birth (1950-2020)



Source: Economic and Social Implications of Population Aging, United Nations 1988.

The old and the new (Rep. of Korea). UNESCO/ACCU/Cho Young-kon



is more likely to die in the following two years unless he marries again, and that there is no such correlation in the case of women.

From her interviews and research she identified the North American quest in life as no longer just building a career and making money but also creating a sense of community and meaning in people's daily lives. Women are the caretakers who maintain the bonds of familial and community intimacy. They have also had to foster individual flexibility to adjust their wants to family needs. Under the stress of modern life, these are the skills that are needed for survival and to maintain a sense of continuity and self-worth in the face of great change and tension. Women's ability to adjust to change, combined with their self-reliability and knowledge that they are needed on an everyday level, have enabled them, argues Friedan, to outlive men. Men are subject to greater stress and are more dependent on others for their everyday needs, and in times of unemployment and social tension have less self-confidence and ability to adjust to change.

Friedan proposes that the typically feminine skills of flexibility and caring are what men should now learn. In the age of dwindling employment and the possibility of decentralized work with modern communication, the family, community and work can be more easily and more rewardingly combined for both sexes.

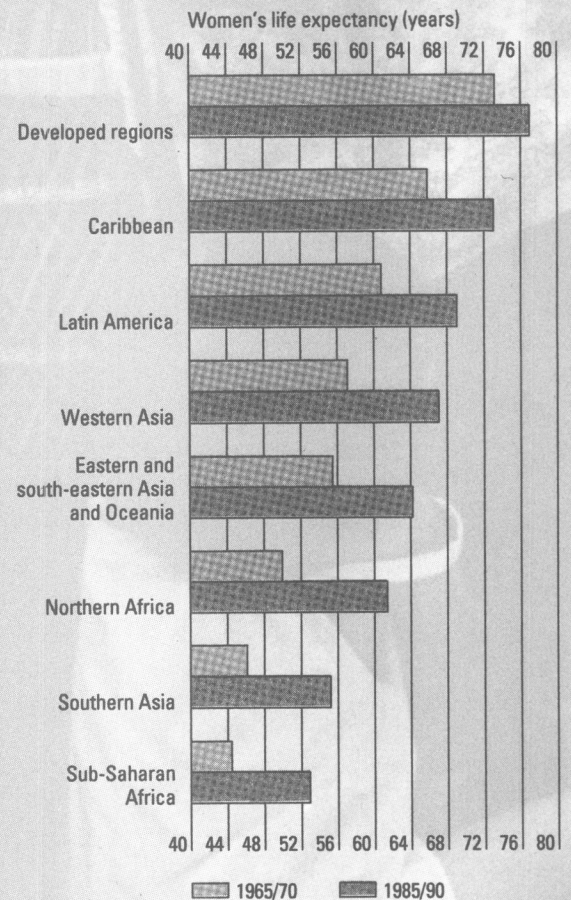
A shift in community values and employment strategies is particularly important when considering the impact of there being so many older people in the West. People of the third age are fast becoming the majority of the United States population. Their presence and abilities should be seen as assets to the community rather than as wastes. Employment should be rethought taking into account the impact of technology and the increasingly large pool of experienced and educated workers among older people. Part-time work with benefits, flexible job-sharing and working from home could all be part of the new information age employment. In a new work paradigm there are many worthwhile tasks which older people could perform in active 'retirement' beyond traditionally worthwhile 'grandparent' jobs such as child care, care for the environment and community care.

The increased life-span has the potential to transform society, though the question was asked as to whether – considering that environmental pollution and social stress have increased so much in recent years – the longevity of the generation of the mid-twentieth century was likely to be repeated. If reproduction of itself is no longer the defining activity and major period of life, a new approach to education and work could enable all people to participate in the community throughout their lives. Friedan argues that this participation would promote longevity, and provide richer and more rewarding lives for us all.



Teaching children (Philippines). Photo: UNESCO/A. P. Garcia

Women's life expectancy is increasing everywhere



Source: Averages for each region calculated by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from *World Population Prospects 1988* (United

Changes in cultural perceptions of motherhood

The UNESCO-SID workshop emphasized the changing role of motherhood in all communities.

Based on the presentation by Jacqueline Pitanguy who referred to 'Mirror Venus' (Espelho de Venus), a book based on research done by CERES in Brazil.

Sisters (Viet Nam). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Truong Cong Anh



With the demographic shifts and changes in productive patterns, women's roles in almost all cultures are no longer derived exclusively from their motherhood status. The following section reflects the discussion at the workshop which looked at the cultural shift in the perception of motherhood, examining the underlying cultural concepts that are informing the main social and demographic trends.

Biology and culture

Although the concept of life-cycles or life-stages is taken from biology, it is none the less socially constructed. This translation of biology into culture implies that the concept of life-cycles incorporates a symbolic dimension – which defines the social images, roles and expectations of a women. How a woman experiences and interprets the biological life-cycle is largely determined by the cultural values, social relations and economic and political context in which she finds herself at different moments of her life.

A discussion on life-cycles fluctuates between our understanding of what is biology and what is culture. The social translation of biology into culture implicitly brings with it society's uneven distribution of power among gender, class, race and ethnicity. A woman's identity at different stages of her life – childhood, adolescence, adulthood and third age – is perceived, experienced and represented differently according to cultural values, social position and access to knowledge and resources.

In today's world the transition between life-stages is no longer necessarily marked by biological change. Women's lives are no longer defined by biology. The onset of menstruation does not, for example, define the age of marriage. If women in their teens have children, the fact of their motherhood does not mark the end of their period of adolescence. They are labelled 'adolescent mothers' with the implication of a lack of maturity and responsibility.

Motherhood is more often a chosen 'planned' event often happening well after marriage and careers are established. Children live at home until well into their twenties. Menopause can be delayed through medical intervention in order to keep women 'young'. As modernity establishes itself, cultural definitions and social expectations outweigh biological changes in determining women's identity.

Such changes hint at increasing tensions between biology and culture, between the traditional expectations of women's role at different life-stages and the many changes women now experience in their societal and family roles and even physiological role. The workshop discussed these contradictions and ambiguities, looking for example at the symbolic role of bleeding. Bleeding has a meaning in all

Education, naturally, figured high on the participants' agenda to challenge current stereotypes of women's cultural and social roles.

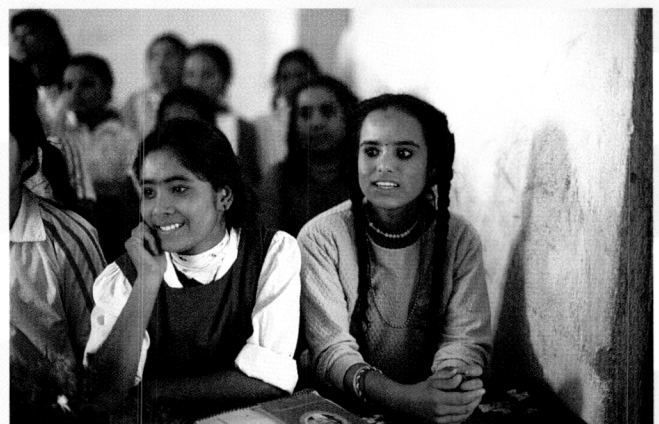
cultures. The onset of menstruation in most cultures is greeted as the girl's entry into adulthood. Menstrual periods are often seen as special periods of time where women need to be in isolation. In the West, the onset of menstruation is not a public event. It is only now beginning to be spoken about as anything other than a 'curse' and women endeavour to hide the fact that they are menstruating. In recent years, sanitary napkins are now being openly advertised signalling the wider acceptance of acknowledging menstruation and also of another set of products to be marketed. Similarly the cessation of bleeding in the West is only now being openly acknowledged, although more and more as a medical event with hormones being prescribed to continue menstruation beyond its natural cessation. This contrasts with traditional societies in Africa where the post-menstrual period is welcomed and is seen as a time of authority and respect for women.

Rites of passage

The traditional rituals or 'rites of passage' which marked women's move from one life-stage to another were linked to women's biological changes. Rites of passage defined women's social right to have children and usually corresponded to the onset of menstruation; reaching the post-menarche age in many societies was a highly honoured position for women. In the modernization process, societies are constructing new rites of passage which correspond to social rather than biological changes; for example, different levels of education and employment.

The rites of passage from one stage to the other correspond in each case to specific social rights and duties. In traditional societies, cultural rights, duties and values are determined principally by the body, and traditional rites of passage make use of biological potential throughout the life-stages. In modern societies, the rites and social duties take the form of documents such as passports and educational diplomas. In industrial societies, for example, childhood is a clear phase, framed by specific laws and social obligations. The life-stage of adolescence is a new one that belongs to modernity and which prolongs entry into adulthood to well beyond puberty; it is a time to learn about sexuality, to complete one's education and

High school (Nepal). Photo: R. Almeida



train for employment. The shift to the third age is blurred and is seen, not as a distinct period but rather as one of shrinking adult capabilities. The period of adulthood itself is difficult to define in modern societies. Is it reached on completion of education when one becomes financially independent, or on marrying or choosing a life partner? Is it over once one retires? Or receives a pension? Or when one's children marry and have children? Or when one leaves one's home to go to a hospice? Biological changes have become divorced from social and cultural affairs, thereby unsettling clear rites of passage where people could celebrate their different ages of life and look towards role models in the age to come.

The separation of the rites of passage from the biological cycle and the move to a definition of life-stages based on socially constructed phases raises a series of interesting questions: How do modern societies construct these new social stages and accordingly define their corresponding rites of passage? Rites of passage should create role models for individuals: what are the new role models and how are they being created? What are the symbols and passage rituals of today's modern and traditional societies?

Power, knowledge and social definitions of motherhood

The moving of cultural definitions of womanhood away from biological definitions located by rites of passage is based on an increasing distance between the social self and the body and its biological potential. In traditional societies women's capacity to give birth is a source of power and authority. The modernization process is diminishing the importance of motherhood and changing the power relationship between generations. Elder women are losing their authority and being disempowered.

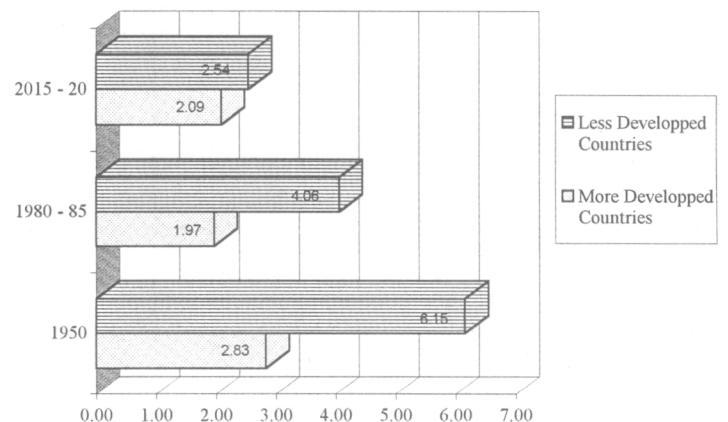
This cultural shift suggests some interesting dilemmas. What are the tensions that result from these changes and how do they affect family structures? How does the change in knowledge, social membership and access to resources determine women's cultural identity? Does the loss of traditional rites of passage based strongly on sexual difference offer new potential for both women and men beyond their gender identity? Can women acquire new social identities without losing their power as mothers? Is motherhood still valued in modern society?

In answering these questions it is important to differentiate between individual women's life-cycle and the family's life-cycle. The family is a cultural institution with its own dynamics which determine not only motherhood but also parenthood and childhood. In the modern industrialized world women's primary identity is no longer tied

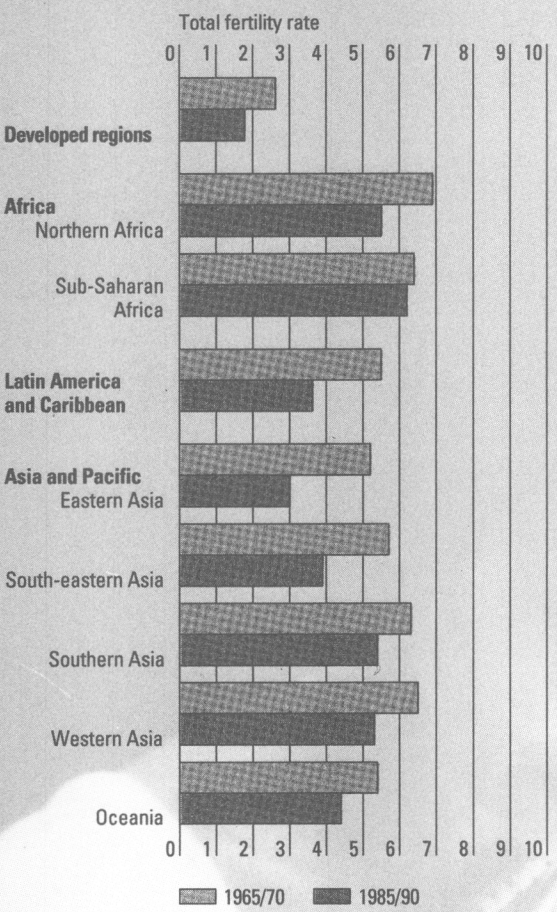


Polyandry. Sherpa woman with her husbands (Nepal). Photo: UNESCO/Gaia B. I.

Worldwide Evolution of Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (1950-2020)



Fertility rates have declined significantly in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Averages for each region calculated by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from *World Population Prospects 1988* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.XIII.7).

exclusively to the family but includes economic and social roles. This trend is also more evident in developing countries with modernization introducing conflict and contradiction between traditional expectations of women's behaviour as mothers and wives and their new role as workers outside the home and the image of what a modern woman is expected to achieve.

Three examples cited at the workshop

The presentation from Pakistan showed the distance between cultural values, beliefs and customs and the economic and social reality. In the process of modernization, far-reaching and rapid change has exposed women's lives to unanticipated situations and roles. This is reflected in the contradictions which abound. A woman can acquire the highest political office, enter the architectural, medical or accounting professions and yet be cloistered, married without being consulted and unable to move without permission. Nor is participation in the work-force without its difficulties. When women cannot fulfil domestic responsibilities, few men offer to share household chores. Leisure time is lost and health weakened. Women can suffer from social disapproval and there can be discord and tension between husband and wife especially when men are not able to be providers. Social attitudes are deeply embedded and it will take time to change patriarchal ideology and structures.

In China the strong push towards modernization seems to have taken hold in the urban areas, but in rural China there are still gaps between the official one-child-one-family policy and the choice of rural women to have more children. Similarly rural women are the majority of the illiterate and badly educated showing that traditional patterns are still present in China despite the official aim to encourage equity. Nor do old women appear to have a respected place in the community.

Working, laughing and eating together (China). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Zhao Zhiwei





Writing for other people (India). Photo: R. Almeida

In Ghana the breakdown of traditional control systems in urban areas has led to tensions between spouses which weakens parental authority and leads to marital breakdown and family disunity. Delayed marriages and longer periods now spent in formal educational institutions have had both positive and negative effects. Young people are now freer to have sex outside marriage, leading to an increase in teenage pregnancy. Although health and family planning education are actively encouraged by the government, there is still a rooted belief that family planning methods affect fertility while sex education continues to be taboo, particularly between generations.

Motherhood today

The workshop addressed the question as to the value of motherhood in modern society, looking at whether the value of motherhood increases or decreases with family planning and how the value of children is changing depending on the social context.

Generally children are highly valued in agricultural societies such as those found in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa (based most commonly on a patrilineal structure). In these societies, highly developed fertility-related rites of passage exist. Children's value is linked to inheritance of land through blood ties. In modern industrial society, capital and property are not transmitted in the same way, thus changing the social value of children and accordingly of motherhood under the capitalist economy. The question therefore arises as to the social (as opposed to individual or emotional) value of children and the way in which this defines the value of motherhood in modern society.

The workshop concluded that in all cultures, whether industrialized or developing, urban or rural, reproductive patterns have changed, yet the value of being a mother is still very important for women of all classes. Children are valued and women continue to desire them. In Austria, for example, 98 per cent of women polled want to have children, although 30 per cent do not have any in the end. The reasons are social rather than biological – lack of child-care facilities inviting the question as to whether modernization has improved women's life choices: have we perhaps lost traditional support systems and knowledge of health and reproduction?

What determines choices?

It is the overlap between individual wishes and ambitions and the value society attaches to motherhood that determines choices. The key issue is this overlap. How are women to ensure that their desire to be paid workers and mothers is socially institutionalized and maintained? At the heart of the question about changes in the value and social position of motherhood is the question of empowerment.

Women indeed have power derived from their fertility and motherhood, yet it is limited. For example, women in West Africa have access to and control of resources but no spiritual existence after death. After death women are no longer recognized as cultural identities and their children belong to the patrilineage. Similarly in most Western societies, women and their children take the husband's surname.

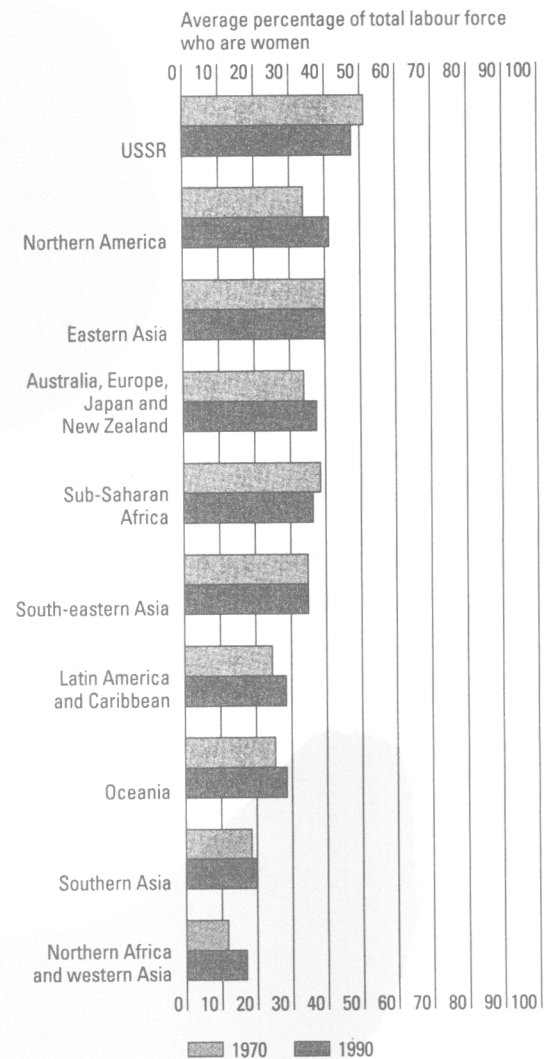
In seeking empowerment, women in modern society have sought several changes in their sense of identity and social role as mothers: for example to 'keep' their own surname, to challenge the institution of marriage and to ask for more equity of responsibility between parents and for more state support for child-care. Such strategies have maintained women's reproductive power and increased their productive power in both competing and complementary ways. There continue to be gaps between women's self-image and the role society ascribes to her, i.e. housewife vs. worker. An important issue for women is how to change the value of work in order to acknowledge that women's traditional work too is valued labour rather than just recognizing men's labour alone as work, as has been the case historically. An important question in this regard is to ascertain how the decrease in the number of children (fertility) will impact on women's sense of self and her potential as a worker.

Another factor in this complex social construction of women's changing social position is the link between women and environment and women's access to resources as a key to women's empowerment. In both rural and urban environments women's relationship to the environment is changing as traditional knowledge of the environment is becoming lost or no longer seems relevant to daily life. Women in poor rural areas are having to cope with environmental degradation while in urban areas women are managing the household in increasingly polluted environments and in spaces increasingly served by technologies outside the woman's direct control.



Fieldwork (Ghana). Photo: UNESCO

Women's share in the labour force increased between 1970 and 1990 in almost every region

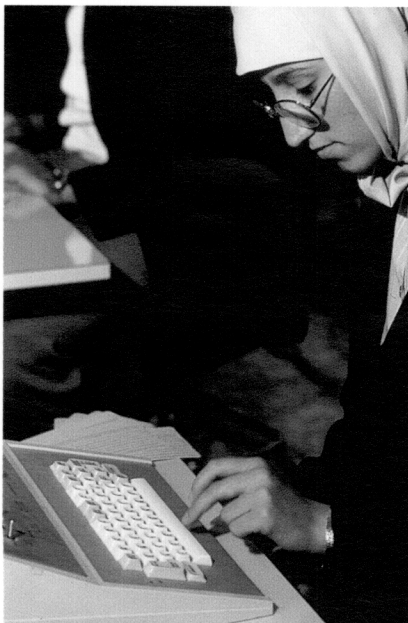


Source: Prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from International Labour Office, *Economically Active Population—Estimates*,

Effects of shifts in working patterns on women's lives

Even a cursory view of the work status of women around the world reveals some startling similarities in very contrasting situations.

Computer course (Iraq). Photo: UNESCO/
Dominique Roger



Globalization, poverty and marginalization

Women's increasing participation in the work force due to growing industrialization and globalization of the economy has had a profound impact on society and women's lives. On the one hand there are positive results in creating avenues for women's independence and greater access to the public sphere. On the other the restructuring of the economy so that market forces determine the distribution of resources and the private sector can expand with minimum restriction has tended to increase the impoverishment of marginalized women.

The current trends that are restructuring industry and employment towards service sectors and casual part-time and outwork may appear to be beneficial to women. But the fact that traditional economics overlooks the importance of women's work in the home, community and informal sectors, results in economic development policies being rarely structured to take account of women's socio-economic reality and being more exploitative than beneficial as a rule.

Women worldwide carry a high labour burden and have lower welfare benefits than men due to their role in social reproduction (taking care of children, the household and the community). Women's role in social reproduction limits their formal employment possibilities. Even when seeking to employ women, traditional economic policy defines the majority of women as disposable cheap labour, offering different (less remunerable) skills than men, more suited to part-time, casual and temporary work.

Women throughout the world are being affected to very different degrees by the globalization of the economy. The inherent gender bias in economic thinking and policy excludes women from whatever benefits the global economy could bring because of job segregation and their role in social reproduction. The result is a diminishing access to quality work and more exploitative and insecure unskilled work, coupled with a burdening of women's unpaid work due to public sector cuts.

Western Europe

In Western Europe, for example, in the newly-formed single market of the European Union, various member countries are competing by lowering wages and curbing regulations with the result that women working in the service and informal sectors are rendered vulnerable and less able to organize in order to safeguard the quality of their work and benefits (maternity leave, etc.). Similarly,

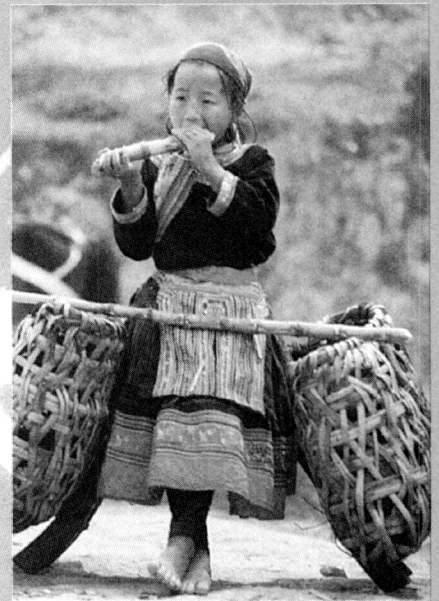
the impact of the new high-tech industries threatens to reduce women's opportunities unless accompanied by training. Low or semi-skilled manufacturing is being carried out increasingly on the periphery of West Europe (Greece, Ireland, Spain) by transnationals hiring women under poor conditions. Similarly sub-contracting work, i.e. piece-work with little or no protection, is increasingly carried out by women in the textile industries or at tele-terminals for marketing and secretarial work. Migrant women are particularly likely to be employed in this type of work.

The current recession, high unemployment and massive cutbacks in welfare provision accompanying the globalization of the economy have led to women moving from full-time to part-time employment and women's jobs being redefined as skilled or lost. While women continue to juggle domestic and child-caring tasks with paid work, men are still considered the primary wage-earners and traditional economic employment has not been restructured to encompass women's social reproductive needs.

Pakistan

In developing countries the picture appears to be somewhat more positive, though there are still inherent problems. In Pakistan, for example, where women have traditionally been confined to the home, 30 to 40 per cent of women are now working in both the formal and informal sectors, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, thus giving them far greater access to information and to a life outside the home. A study carried out in a low-income area in Lahore (Kot Lakhpat) shows that over the period 1981-90 many more women were seeking employment in the formal sector, more girls were going to school, women were participating more fully in family enterprises, home-based women workers were negotiating directly with employers rather than middle men, and consumer goods owned by female members of the household were on the increase.

Permission for women to work outside the home depends on their age and the general situation of their household. Restrictions on women's movements outside the home relax after forty-five years of age: however, it is mainly young women who work in factories (in segregated spaces). Young women are keen to work outside their home, and older women who work encourage their daughters to do so too. The money earned by female members of the household is used by the mother of the family mainly to meet the daily needs of the home. The increased participation in the labour force has led to a change in marriage patterns with women marrying later and daughters who are the major bread-winners in the family often not being encouraged to marry. Since it is economic crisis rather than social change that has created the demand for Pakistan's women to work outside the home, there is always a danger that when the economy improves, women will be forced back into the home despite their proven resilience and working abilities.

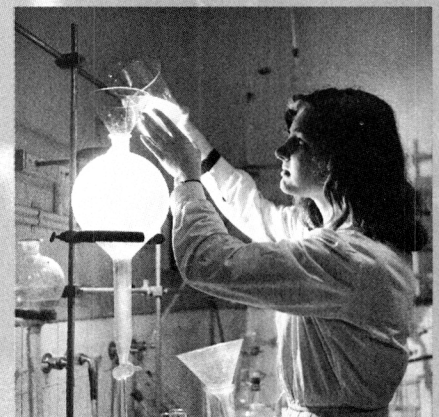


Taking a break (Viet Nam). Photo: UNESCO/ ACCU/Du Hai



Aro Hospital (Nigeria). Photo: UNESCO/Almasy-Vauthey

Trainee chemist (Poland). Photo: UNESCO/ P. Almasy





Welding: a job for women (Philippines).

Photo: UNESCO/Dominique Roger

Women's economic activity rates rose in most developed and developing regions from 1970 to 1990



Source: Prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat from International Labour Office, *Economically Active Population—Estimates*.

Latin America

In Latin America the impact is perhaps less dramatic because culturally women were not as confined to the home as in Asia. The female labour-force rate of participation in economic activity doubled for the first time in a period of economic progress and then again during the current economic crisis. The economic strategy has been to enter the global market through export manufacturing. The workers in the export process are mainly women who enter the work-force in order to meet the rising costs of living and the decreased wage-earning capacity of men. The lack of benefits (there is no pension, for example) and low wages create problems for women who in old age can no longer rely on support from their children. On the other hand, women's power within the family is increasing in line with their economic contribution. Poverty as a whole is increasing, while jobs offering good conditions are rare. Structural adjustment policies have reduced government social services, thus shifting the burden onto the family and placing additional burdens on women who have to work double shifts in the home and outside to meet basic needs. At the same time the mass media are encouraging a consumer-oriented society by putting pressure on households to increase their consumer commodities.

Ghana

In Ghana, as in other sub-Saharan African countries, the rapid population growth, degradation of the land and adverse climatic conditions, combined with mismanagement of economic and structural adjustment programmes, have led to a worsening of the conditions of marginalized groups and those living in poverty. In crowded urban areas, women are largely engaged in petty trade in the informal sector or lower levels of the formal sector. Their low educational attainment and limited access to training opportunities leave them with few occupational choices but far greater responsibilities in terms of family needs.

China

Women in China have perhaps experienced the most significant changes in the transition from a small-peasant-scale economy to a modern industrial society and market economy. Women have been involved in economic activity on an almost equal basis alongside men in this transition. In agriculture 50 per cent of workers are women. This has led to a reduction in women's economic dependence on their families and husbands; equal pay has enhanced women's social status, marking a major shift in the deep-rooted ideology that holds that women are inferior to men.

Women immigrants in Mexico and Switzerland

In both Mexico and Switzerland, according to the paper presented by Corinne Wacker, migrant women from Chatino, in the case of Mexico City, and Sicily, in the case of Switzerland, have developed

intergenerational strategies to cope with the difficulty of balancing participation in the work-force and reproductive work. Young women entering the labour force experience conflict with their status as mothers and rely on their mothers, mothers-in-law and women's networks for child care. Attachment to the extended family remains strong though the younger women derive their status more from their work than from their family status through motherhood and it is the elder women who experience an increased status from their continued responsibilities with children and family affairs. The situation of these migrant women raises interesting questions about whether the need for women to enter the work-force involves them in generational conflict or alliance. The strategies used by women of different age groups to empower each other is a further area calling for investigation.



Creating (New Zealand). Photo: UNESCO/ACCU/Karen Angus

New visions: towards a conclusion

Differences and commonalities

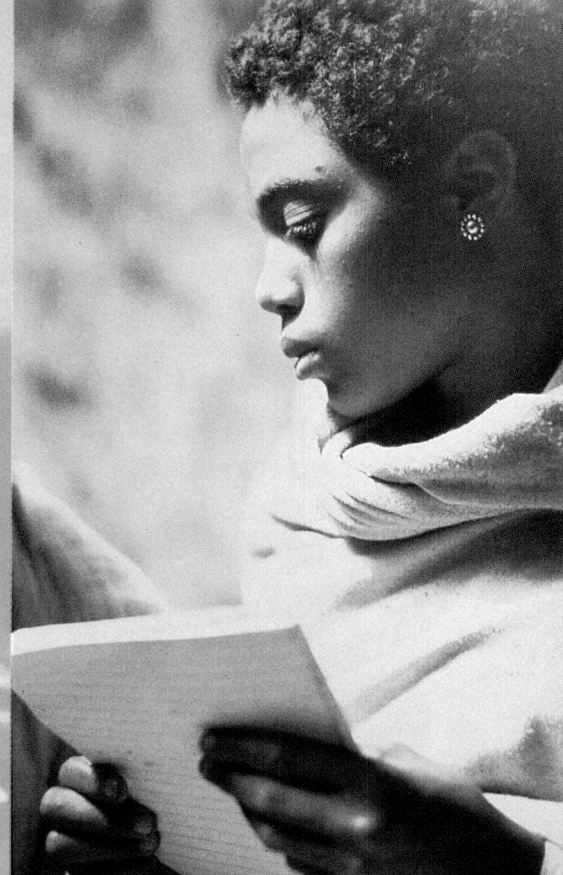
The workshop was careful to allow for differences in women's experience due to education level, age, class, race and ethnicity, while at the same time seeking to identify commonalities. Issues of power, marginalization, poverty, the importance of women's own knowledge and networking, and the need for further economic, social and cultural change were common themes. Concepts such as the third age and adolescence found an echo in every country, though the experience of a woman's depression due to frustration and loneliness in her seventies in the United States could not be equated with that of a woman in her fifties in Ghana eking out a living in an urban slum.

The dynamics of the workshop reflected the sensitivity of the issues under discussion and the difficulty of finding common strategies that could embrace the richness of all the participants' experiences. Language itself was a barrier to full communication and not all the participants felt that they could express themselves properly in the working language – English – of the workshop. Different disciplinary approaches led to fruitful exchange, while at times the terms being used had to be extremely carefully translated. Similarly no single participant could assume that her experience was a universal one and several questions were asked about individual experiences and backgrounds, thereby bringing out the many cultural and historical differences between the participants.

Beyond polarities: looking to the future

All agreed on the need for new visions that would go beyond the current polarities of men/women, young/old, North/South and reproduction/production. As women's life stages are no longer

defined in terms of reproduction, and women have demanded and to some degree achieved control of their reproductive powers, the workshop agreed that women's identity can no longer be thought of merely in terms of reproduction. New areas have to be addressed which take account of women's changing role in production and the changing definitions of the family while still valuing women's reproductive role. Women need to integrate their experiences into the larger economy and culture. The structure of work too has to change in order to reintegrate work and the family for both men and women. The growing numbers of women and men living to the third age need to be recognized, and this age like others should be seen as a defining period in a person's life in its own terms, not as decline from youth. Contemporary research indicates no significant decline until well into the eighties or just before death for women and men ageing in communities, and in fact the possibility of further development until the end of life. When this new totality of a person's life span is taken into account, it requires redefinition of power and institutions and new thinking about community, job-sharing, environment, health care, services and political participation.



Reading (Ethiopia). Photo: UNESCO/Dominique Roger

A new society for women and men

These are issues not for women alone, but for women working with men. The time is past when a women's movement had to exclude men in the fight 'against' patriarchy. The time has come rather for women's visions to restructure and redefine work in order to fashion a new society for women and men based on women's experience and skills as care-givers and reproducers. It is not a question of adding gender to the world's major cosmologies, but rather of rewriting the latter at their very roots. To achieve greater community participation, the positive aspects of traditional communities need to be blended with the new benefits of modernization. The conceptualization of 'public space' where, in effect, non-governmental organizations in every nation and city would regularly convene and play a recognized role in formulating new questions and innovations in public policy, would be a worthy outcome of the Beijing UN Conference on Women. This would give concrete form to a new vision of community beyond polarization, and a new paradigm for social theory and policy transcending our separate issues.

Matter for research: advancing from the known to the unknown

The general agreement reached at the Paris meeting does not mean that the discussion is closed. Quite the contrary, in fact. A number of questions remain to be answered in days to come. In order to overstep polarities and help shape women's vision, women and men have to engage in research pushing outwards beyond current knowledge frontiers. The 1995 Paris workshop concluded with a discussion of the following key research issues that the participants hoped could be the substance of debate in Beijing:

How can women in different positions in the life-stages use their visions and experiences in order to bring these insights to mainstream development discourse? This investigation would examine the interrelationship between women's knowledge, social position, access to and control over resources and how women could create new social institutions and networks.

How does the intra- and inter-generational transfer of knowledge occur among women on health and population issues, focusing on the fact that women's knowledge includes, in addition to medical and technical aspects of fertility and reproduction, components of cultural rites and duties, social membership, and access to and control over resources?

How have the different family patterns in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and societies in transition changed due to economic globalization and international stratification, including the problems of violence and social and political unrest and the effects of virtual absence of men from the family?

How do the zones of silence between the generations operate? Why is there a growing lack of communication between the generations?

How are the identities (social and psychological) of women and men affected by changing economic and social processes when traditional values and beliefs are confronted with modernity?

How can countries incorporate feminist values and pluralistic ideas into their development strategies, and how can new institutions be created in which NGOs could play a clear governing role?

How is the relationship between women and natural resources changing? The following questions could be explored: Do women with less children have a different view of the environment? How do migrant women cope with the management of resources, waste water and so forth? Are third-age women more aware of environmental changes? Will education make women more aware of environmental changes? How have the cultural patterns of knowledge of the environment changed?

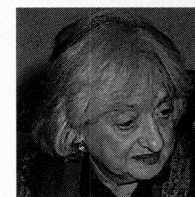
PARTICIPANTS AT THE WORKSHOP



Lourdes Arizpe (Mexico). Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO. Following studies in social anthropology, worked as a professor and researcher at the Colegio de México and the National University of Mexico. Served as Vice-President of the International Social Sciences Research Council. Has published a large body of research in the fields of anthropological and ethnological sciences, culture, women and the environment.



Anastasia N. Bozhedonova (Republic of Sakha-Yakutia of the Russian Federation). Teacher, methodologist in education and currently Chairwoman of the Committee of Family, Women and Demographic Policy to the President of the Republic. Has published various articles on these topics in her country.



Betty Friedan (United States). Well-known feminist activist, founder of NOW, author, among other works, of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and *The Fountain of Age* (1993). Currently guest scholar at the Wilson International Center for Scholars, The Smithsonian Institution, and visiting professor of public policy at George Mason University.