

WOMAN

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ILO STUDY EXPOSES GENDER INEQUALITIES

The women workers of South-East Asia are over-worked, underpaid and restricted to marginal or labour-intensive sectors with dim prospects of economic advancement. Their contribution to family income and their stabilizing role in society have yet to receive the recognition they deserve. Policy-Planners often overlook the special needs of working women, says a study by the Asian Regional Team for Employment Promotion (ARTEP) of the International Labour Office (ILO). (Women Workers in South-East Asia: Problems and Strategies, ILO/ARTEP, P.O. Box No.643, New Delhi—110 001, India).

In post-colonial South-East Asia, development programmes have opened up new opportunities for women, but these have also tended to create "new inequalities and exacerbate old ones", leading to worsening poverty in some cases. This is further worsened by systems of male domination and gender-hierarchies. "Thus, when development programmes have negative effects, these are felt more acutely by women; when development programmes have positive effects, women are not necessarily the ones who benefit".

In rural areas, studies have shown that "women have heavier work burdens than men, working longer hours and undertaking a multiplicity of income-earning activities in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in order to survive". The earnings of these women are crucial for family survival - "in other words, women are active contributors to rural development, with very substantial responsibility for the maintenance of rural life", notes the study. But "women are ignored and continue to perform their work...because of competitive pressure on land and other resources as well as population pressure, without any assistance in the form of education, training and improved technology".

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FRENCH GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS WOMEN'S ACCESS TO ABORTION DRUG

In France RU 486, a new drug which induces abortion early in pregnancy, has been the cause of controversy between advocates for the right to abortion and anti-abortionists.

On September 23, 1988 RU 486 was approved by the French government. However, anti-abortion forces applied pressure to the manufacturers of the drug, Roussel-Uclaf, who withdrew it from the market some weeks later. Then, the French government countered the move by ordering the company to keep the drug on the market.

So far RU 486 is available only in China and France. The drug is only effective during the first five to ten weeks of pregnancy. In France the law allows its use during the first five weeks which limits its use to women who detect their pregnancies early, and decide quickly to abort. A woman takes one pill a day for three days, then receives an injection or vaginal suppository containing prostaglandins which cause contractions which expel the embryo from the uterus.

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LIVING IN CITIES

By the year 2000, 75 per cent of Latin America's population, 42 per cent of Africa's and 37 per cent of Asia's will be urbanized.

This population will come mainly from the cities themselves but city people are being joined by refugees from the countryside. Whole families, who can no longer make a living from the land are fleeing to the squalor of urban centres in the hope of better lives.

In the first half of the 1980's at least ten million Africans were forced off their land, largely by extended drought.

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development the Third World will by the end of the century "have to increase

by 65 per cent its capacity to produce and manage its urban infrastructure, services and shelter - merely to maintain present conditions".

And the new city-dwellers still have an impact on the rural environment. Through the expansion of the cities themselves, the suburbs and shantytowns spread out and swallow up more and more adjacent farmland. The 1988 UNFPA Report points out that even in the United States, a country of low population growth, some 2.5m ha of farmland were lost to urban sprawl during 1967 - 1975.

But cities consume much more than land. On average a city of one million inhabitants consumes every day about 625,000 metric tons of water, 2,000 metric tons of food and 9,500 metric tons of fuel. Most of the food and water will have to come from the rural areas. But so will much of the fuel. A study in Kenya showed that the major contribution to deforestation was not the villagers' use of wood for fuel (which was found to be sustainable) but rather its wholesale conversion to charcoal for sale to people living in towns and cities.

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FORCED CESAREAN

The Washington DC Court of Appeals has ruled that a D.C. Superior Judge acted properly in ordering a pregnant woman to undergo a cesarean. Angie Carter, a 27-year-old terminally ill cancer patient, died two days after she was forced by the court to undergo a cesarean against her wishes and the wishes of her husband, parents, and physicians. The 26-week old fetus did not survive the surgery.

The court reasoned that under the Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade the state had a compelling interest in the "viable fetus" that was more important than the mother's "right against bodily harm". The court did indicate that such decisions should

be made by "bioethical committees" in hospitals rather than by the judiciary.

Lynn Paltrow of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). who appealed the decision on behalf of the deceased mother, called the decision "a complete and unjustified departure from American legal tradition" and an invasion of the rights of pregnant women and terminally ill patients. "What it says to pregnant women is that you don't have rights to bodily integrity".

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PHILIPPINE WOMEN PETITION AQUINO

The Filipina feminist radical group GABRIELA is petitioning President Corazon Aquino to investigate the September murder of a prosecutor who was working on charges of sexual slavery and trafficking in women.

In October 1987, Elizabeth Mamac filed charges in Butuan city against former city prosecutor Nestorio Placer and Jan Schoeman, a citizen of the Netherlands. Mamac charged that Placer was an accomplice of Schoeman, who raped her and another woman and forced them into prostitution. Schoeman directly recruited the other woman; Placer sent him Mamac.

GABRIELA and the Dutch Foundation against Trafficking of Women have supported the women in bringing the charges.

Schoeman was deported to the Netherlands for trial. GABRIELA initially had wanted him to face trial and serve a prison term in the Philippines, but Filipino and Dutch officials convinced them that Schoeman would serve a longer term in the Netherlands because the justice system in the Philippines is so corrupt.

The perils of the justice system were highlighted when Macario Balansag, who was studying charges against Placer, was murdered. GABRIELA believes that the murder was connected with the sexual slavery case.

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