



Gender and Trade Workshop

Participants from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, China, the Phillipines and Malaysia participated in this workshop in Phnom Penh over June 23-30, coordinated by Womens Agenda for Change/Oxfam Hong Kong Cambodia.

The following were the major objectives:

- To examine impact of trade liberalization in Mekong countries with a gender emphasis
- To understand how the new international economic order is affecting third world countries' ability to develop
- To examine the links between the IMF/WB policies and prescriptions; the WTO rules and regulations, and the struggle to maintain sovereignty for nation states

Introduction

International bodies promoting trade and economic liberalisation:

- International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- World Bank (WB)
- Asia Development Bank (ADB)
- World Trade Organisation (WTO)

World Bank, 1999:

“While greater (economic) openness benefits the majority, it harms the poorest. The results show that the costs of adjusting to greater openness are borne exclusively by the poor regardless of how long the adjustment takes. In addition, the consequences of terms of trade changes are far greater for the poor than for the middle or wealthy classes....At least in the short run, globalization appears to increase poverty and inequality....”

.... But the WB still thinks trade liberalisation is a great thing, which they push onto poor countries using the following instruments:

IMF and WB push trade liberalisation and other changes as *conditions* for gaining development loans under comprehensive policy packages called ‘Structural Adjustment Programs’ (SAP’s), which have now been re-named ‘Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers’ (PRSP’s)

In order to join the WTO, member countries have to sign onto a series of binding WTO agreements, including TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property System), TRIMS (Trade Related Investment Measures), GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), AoA (Agreement on Agriculture) etc, all based on the trade liberalisation agenda

Since the 1980s at least 90 poor countries have been forced to sign structural adjustment programs with the IMF/WB. They usually include privatization of public assets, reduced spending on health and education and other measures to benefit the rich and foreign companies. None of them have led to a significant reduction in poverty, and many have led to a drastic increase.

Major trade liberalisation policies:

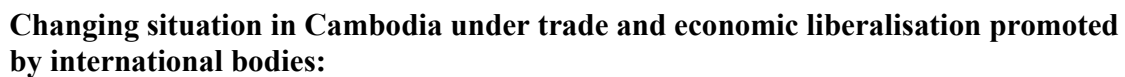
- Eliminate barriers to imports
- Promote intensive agriculture – new seeds need more chemicals, more water, more investments — higher input costs for farmers
- Focus on export crops – more and more land used for plantations, resulting in landlessness
- Open all sectors to privatisation and commercialisation – industry, land and agriculture, natural resources, credit, services, health and education etc
- Tight budget constraint, so less money for health, education, agricultural subsidies, sacking public sector workers, while giving tax concessions to the rich to “encourage” them to invest

‘At the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, seats and votes are allocated according to member countries’ economic bulk, leaving poor countries defenceless. Directors from rich countries control more than 60% of the votes, while the US has veto power over any extraordinary vote.’

Despite the policies imposed on developing countries, rich countries maintain protectionist policies because they run the international organisations, they make the rules and know how to manipulate them, justifying huge subsidies on their own agricultural products, which they can dump on developing countries’ markets, while making fake ‘dumping’ charges against poor countries, eg the US dumping charges against Vietnamese catfish, which receive no subsidies.

Intensification, export orientation and land privatisation leads to big agribusiness and big fishery development, driving people off their land, destroying their food security. WB is

‘A general trend was towards the concentration of farms, in a wide cross-section of countries ... the process marginalised small producers and added to unemployment and poverty’, FAO review of developing countries under trade liberalisation 1999



- The top 10% of landowners own 33% of the land, while the bottom 20% own 4% of the land
- Farmers' incomes have fallen below the 1993 level, according to *government statistics*
- Reduced access to natural resources, eg forests, lakes, rivers – taken over by plantations and large concessions to companies – people can no longer catch fish and other seafoods in many natural fisheries as they are locked out, while the price of fish has increased 18%

- Total employment in agriculture has been reduced from 77% to 70% since 1997, but as we see later in the field, there are very few other rural jobs available
- Cheap agricultural imports due to tariff cuts impoverishing local farmers
- Agricultural inputs - Higher cost of fertiliser, fertilisers causing declining soil quality, pesticide pollution, new seeds at higher cost

- Water and electricity privatisation, all services open to entry by multinational corporations – French company bought Cambodian electricity, and the price rose 24%
- Lack of agricultural subsidies and services
- High cost of education and health care

PRSP: “Civil service reform” – elimination of redundant workers, attrition, strict limits on new hiring, further downsizing – ‘civil servants’ include teachers and health workers. Education – “reduce proportion of non-teaching staff to 15%, increase pupil/teacher ratios for secondary school to 35”

- Women migrating to cities to work in garment factories or sex work. Reasons for sex work include being sold or tricked into it, being unable to afford to pay the \$50 entrance fee to get job in garment factory – families often mortgage land to help daughter enter garment factory, leading to bondage. Stigma once women enter sex work, difficult to get out.

Observations Regarding Economic Growth and Poverty

Participants discussed a number of observations regarding economic growth in developing countries, which contradict ‘standard’ economic theory as pushed by the IMF, WB and WTO.

1. Economic growth and the people’s wealth and incomes are not directly related.

This observation was shown to be valid both for developing and developed nations, and also for regions within nations. Misconceptions are related to the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator of the wealth of a country - GDP does not measure how this wealth is distributed.

Regarding *developed countries*, in Australia, economic growth is higher than ever, but Australians are being told the country cannot afford to give them things they used to have, like free university education. The following table shows that the US, despite having the 2nd highest GDP in the world, has the worst ranking among 18 developed countries for human poverty:

Developed Country	GDP per capita	Human Poverty Index rank
United States	29,605 – Rank 2	Rank 18
Germany	22,169 – Rank 13	Rank 6
Sweden	20,659 – Rank 17	Rank 2

UNDP Human Development Report 2000

Regarding *developing countries*, Argentina experienced very rapid economic growth throughout the 1990’s and was a most faithful follower of IMF/WB trade liberalisation and privatisation policies. Yet since the economic collapse two years ago, over 60 per cent of the population now live in poverty, including a large percentage on the verge of starvation, even though the country produces twice as much food as it needs to feed its whole population. Food is being exported to pay international debts accrued under the vicious neo-liberal economic regime of the 1990’s.

China has experienced 7-8% annual growth for years, farmers' income in rural areas can't cover production costs for next year because agricultural input prices are so high. Families must now pay for education – when GDP was lower, education was free. In Laos, economic growth includes investment in hotels, nightclubs, forest concessions etc, which do not help the poor.

In contrast, examples of places with small GDPs that have low infant mortality, high literacy, excellent health care, and other positive social benefits include Cuba, and Kerala state in India:

	Cuba	Latin America & Caribbean (average)	Lower middle income countries (average)
Life expectancy (in years)	76	70	69
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	8	32	36
Access to safe water (% of pop'n)	93	73	84
Literacy (% of population)	96	87	81

Source: World Bank Development Report, 1998.

Similarly, compared to much richer (in GDP) countries in Asia, Vietnam's indicators are at least as good, sometimes better, and far better than countries on a similar GDP level:

	Vietna	Bangladesh	India	Indonesia	Philippines	Thailan
GDP per	\$350	\$350	\$440	\$972	\$1092	\$2593
Literacy rate	94%	40%	56%	86%	95%	95%
Life	68	58	63	65	68	69
Infant Mortality per	29	75	71	47	35	33
Maternal mortality per 100,000 births	105	850	440	390	210	200
No. of people per hospital bed	263	3300	1250	1428	910	600
No. of people per doctor	2500	5000	2500	7000	10,000	5000

(World Bank World Development Indicators, 1999, for the year 1997)

Regarding regions within countries, it was pointed out that eastern Thailand is being targeted for development (primarily for Eucalyptus plantations), but the benefits go to families and companies outside the area or country. 100,000 hectares are owned by *one* Thai company. The people who lived there have been driven off their land, the daughters have left for Bangkok to work as household servants or to become sex workers. In the central highlands of Vietnam, there has been massive expansion of the coffee industry for

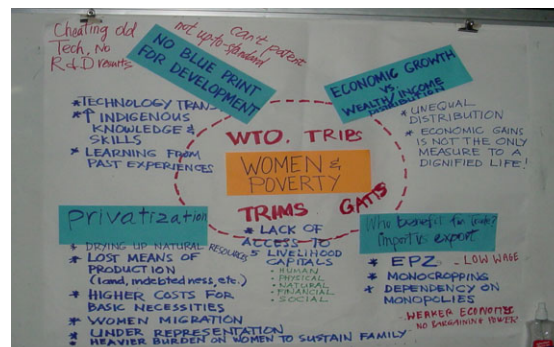
export, but there is also massive poverty (52% - the highest of any region in the country), exacerbated by the coffee price crash.

The role of credit must be taken into account, because it can create good GDP growth figures, but the poor tend to suffer while moneylenders reap the benefits. The micro-credit systems adopted by many countries originated in Bangladesh with the Grameen Bank. The bank gives out small loans to poor women at 8% interest *per month* (96% a year) - some women have fled the country because they couldn't pay back the loans. Grameen Bank is now the richest bank in Bangladesh with spectacular real estate. This wealth has been built on the backs of poor women. Historically, economic development is often achieved through the exploitation of women.

2. Poverty is not a natural phenomenon, but the result of inequality and lack of wealth distribution

The phrase "wealth distribution" means not only income, but also lack of access to basic social services in general (health care, education, legal services, etc).

Natural disasters can sometimes cause massive poverty. But some natural disasters are caused or exacerbated by non-natural elements (logging, development, etc). Also, since natural disasters are a regular part of human life, most societies are capable of preparing for them. So, when communities can't rebound after a natural disaster it suggests the problem is poverty.



The issue of HIV/AIDS is also an example of inequality. In wealthy countries, AIDS is mostly under control, those who are infected can usually access medicine. But in poor countries, AIDS is out of control, they cannot access health care and drugs to keep them alive - the TRIPS agreement prevents poor countries from producing generic drugs that are more affordable.

Cotton farmers, in Africa and elsewhere, are being ruined by the high cotton subsidies in western countries, which keep their prices below the market cost. This is a major cause of poverty worldwide among growers of other crops being heavily subsidised for rich country exporters.

In Lijang, China, farmers are being forced off their land into urban areas for tourist development. The government says they will find jobs in urban areas, but, there are no jobs. Before, they were poor, but at least they had their land, and could use it - once they've lost their land, the farmers have no bargaining power with bosses.

Similarly, Cambodians have always been poor, but *now* are complaining about poverty – in the past, at least they had some control over their situation (land, food, fishing etc). Cambodia is rich in natural resources, such as the giant inland sea of Ton Le Sap, but they are being auctioned off to private companies, so villagers no longer have access to fishing and other communal resources, which are fenced off by these companies. Cambodia has also started to import timber, which makes it impossible for villagers to sell their wood, while it has also auctioned off large sections of forest to private companies for logging, reducing the price of wood and driving villagers out of business. Women are particularly affected - in Rattankiri, ethnic minority women are the main collectors of forest products. When the forests were sold without their knowledge for export timber business, they have to go elsewhere, often doubling the time involved

3. It is not possible for the underdeveloped countries to repeat the experience of development of the “wealthy” nations

It might be possible, under different policies, but the world is very different from 100 years ago and countries are different. The World Bank and IMF tell Vietnam that it should try to be like Singapore, but Singapore is an island. Development needs to be tailored to individual needs of each country. International development “consultants” have sometimes worked in one country, but they know nothing about a new country they go to to help make policy.

Western countries achieved development by doing the opposite of what developing countries are being told to do. Britain and US fiercely protected their local economies by imposing tariffs, and by freely “pirating” each others’ inventions (no patents or TRIPS in those days). When the English textile industry was at its height, it had to invade India to destroy its textile industry.

One supposed benefit of trade liberalisation is acquiring technology to create good jobs, not just cheap labour. But U.S. and other western countries keep tight control over their Research and Development of technology and prevent transfer. WTO TRIMS agreement bans poor countries from demanding technology transfer as part of a deal to allow in foreign investors, while TRIPS forces them to pay for technology patents from rich countries.



‘Can the WTO sometimes serve as a forum for poor countries as it serves rich countries’ business interests?’ The WTO TRIPS agreement was used by India to challenge the patent put on its basmati rice by a US multinational. But, though in this case it was used to fight absurd claims, it is TRIPS which allows such claims in the first place. The procedure of litigating the claims takes an excessively long period of time, is costly and complicated, the decision is left up to the WTO disputes court, and other similar cases have not been won. Communal knowledge that has been around for thousands of years should not be able to be patented.

Thailand established a process for Thai traditional healers to register their traditional medicines, so that if pharmaceutical companies want to distribute them, they would have to negotiate with the healers. The US State Department warned Thailand that this “could constitute a violation of the TRIPS agreement”

What is the WTO? It is a set of rules prohibiting trade restrictions, restrictions on investment, prohibiting restrictions on the amount of imports and exports etc. As a result, poor countries aren’t able to develop their own industries, because they can’t protect them against cheaper foreign industrial products with tariffs or quotas. Rich countries also produce agricultural products on large industrial plantations, lowering the price of goods on the world market, thus even competing with agricultural products of poor countries, resulting in a huge loss of income.

For example, Vietnam’s cotton, corn and soybean industries. Once these cheap, heavily subsidised U.S. products come into Vietnam under the recent bilateral trade agreement (based on WTO rules), Vietnam’s production will be severely affected. This has happened in dozens of countries around the world (vegetables in Sri Lanka, corn in the Phillipines and Mexico, grain in Haiti, soybeans in India, wheat in Kenya etc).

China’s experience has stirred debate about whether WTO membership will increase employment or unemployment. When a multinational bought the rights to a number of well-known Chinese brands, they stopped use of these brands and only promoted their own brands.

‘Trade liberalisation can bring in cheaper motorbikes, TVs, etc, so poor people can buy them more easily than locally produced products’ - yet if poor people don’t have money to buy food, how will they have money to buy these products? In Cambodia, many people in the city have TV’s, and other luxury items, but people in the rural areas don’t. A country cannot pick and choose. Tariffs also must be slashed on a country’s agricultural products, so farmers can’t compete and so have even less money to buy “cheap” industrial products.



4. Trade does not automatically benefit both sides - Export oriented growth benefits only a small minority

The success of each country's exports depends on how cheaply it can price its goods, and the easiest costs to cut are wages. But cheap labour exports backfire because workers earn less so have less to spend on the domestic market. 'The expansion of exports is predicated on the contraction of internal purchasing power. Poverty is an input on the supply side' – Michael Chossudovsky, University of Ottawa

We need to export, but now we are exporting products and in amounts that we have no control over. We need to produce diverse crops, for example, so that we can export some crops and eat some crops. If we only grow and export one or two cash crops, we are very vulnerable to world price crashes in those markets. In recent years, there have been price crashes for rice, coffee, tea, sugar, cashews, pepper, fruit, prawns, cotton, garments etc – developing country exports.

When developing countries are forced to eliminate their trade barriers to other countries' imports, they must, as a result, increase their exports to pay for increased imports. As a result, crops that would stay in the country to feed people, are exported to other countries.

Every country wants to export more than it imports. So, someone has to lose. Exports require low production prices, but products still need to be good quality, according to demands of other countries. Small producers lose because they can't provide the high productivity required.

US companies sell chicken legs to the Philippines at below cost due to subsidies - the chicken leg industry has been destroyed in the Philippines. This is an "opportunity" for the Philippines to sell chicken breast to the U.S. (Americans prefer breast to leg). In fact, companies enticed small farmers to produce chicken, abandoning their other crops, and gave them start-up costs, but in exchange, farmers must buy from the company. These farmers are now deeply in debt.

Dangers of such contracts – in Thailand, a US company contracted farmers to produce chickens for 25 baht, but then bought them for only 10 baht, citing "quality".

When multi-fibre agreement on textile/garment export quotas to rich countries ends in December 1994, all poor countries thrown into open competition with each other for

markets, likely to drive down wages and conditions – potential threat to jobs of 200,000 garment workers in Cambodia.

Problems with EPZs (Export Processing Zones) - need more research on the sexual, physical and psychological effects of this work on women. In China, for example, women workers all have to live in a female dormitory. Married women and women with partners must go somewhere else to be with their partners. On their return, gangsters often rape and brutalize women.

Environmental cost of increased exports aren't included in the calculation – intensification to promote greater exports cuts across the need for long term, sustainable planning in our economic, trade policies. If we don't manage our resources well, we may use up a resource in one generation, such as through over-fishing of shrimp.



Field Trip Observations

1. Initial discussion at pagoda

Monks told us that conditions were worsening for the villagers, that the soil was losing its fertility due to overuse of fertilisers, that many families have lost land or some of their land, and that only a few large landowners own much fertile land and are able to sell rice onto a wider market.

Many villagers have taken credit from ACLEDA, a microcredit agency originally set up by the UNDP but now registered as a business, at 3.5% interest per month. Private moneylenders charge 20% per month, but this is usually for smaller amounts. Speaking of “another village in the district”, before an NGO micro-credit agency appeared about 10 families were in debt, now about 90 families are. (Another extortionist microcredit agency is PRASAC, set up by the EU in 1995).

Water has been privatised – someone owns the pump that pumps water from the river. Villagers pay 700 riel for one cubic metre. In the past, the water level was higher, so a pump not necessary, but now level is low due to stream being cut off in various places upstream by large private plots.

2. Observations in the field

Things are getting harder for the villagers, not one interviewee has said that it is getting easier.

‘In the past, living conditions were better, now prices of food and everyday needs are increasing, now we must pay for everything, soil fertility is declining. There are not many kinds of jobs that people can do, so many people are competing in the same job’.

Education is expensive. Costs 5-10,000 R for each child to enter school. Every Monday they must pay for examinations. The state is unable to pay a living wage, and teachers are forced to work as private tutors most of the time to make ends meet. The poor cannot access full education.

‘All service sectors are covered by GATS, except services provided by the government on a completely non-commercial basis or where there are no private suppliers to compete with. Governments of poor countries cannot afford to supply services completely free, instead often subsidising them or providing them free for only the very poor. However, under GATS, these subsidies will not be allowed, as they would be viewed by the WTO as ‘trade-distorting’ measures.’

Health conditions are very poor. Health centre, 8 staff, 6 male, 2 female. Government, pays males only. Women receive daily income from centre fees - fees up front. “We pay 2000 R to visit the clinic, including 3 days of medicines for common illnesses. This is equivalent to 2 days food for my family.” In this district only 2 villages with free/subsidised health service (district has 85 villages). Lots of malnutrition, and several adults have goitre, but weren’t receiving treatment.

‘One of the prime targets for liberalisation of services in GATS 2000 is health care – to examine the potential for the commercialisation of each country’s health sectors’ (Save the Children, London, 2001)

**Getting sick leads to debt or death: ‘I would prefer to just die when I get sick rather than to borrow money for medical treatment.’
Privatisation of health also increases women’s caring burden.**

Water is expensive; people are required to buy water from the wealthy people who own the pump since the water was privatized; many can’t afford it so bring it from the river in buckets. There is no electricity in the village (no lights at night), with the exception of using car batteries; transport is limited to using bicycles and some motorbikes, as well as a large number of ponies, mules and horses for movement of goods. There is no telephone system.

‘An hour of water for irrigation costs 3500-4000 R. A 1000 square metre farm requires 10 hours of water pumping’

No social programs, no subsidies, no networks of support systems, no mass organisations. But good friends and neighbours are important, as it can be a channel for support. They also may give out credit and not charge interest or barter exchange for rice.

Labouring is important to earn money, but income is decreasing. There are very few jobs that can be done, therefore lots of people are trying to do the same things, oversupply of

goods, less market per vendor, lower wages as the market is oversupplied with labour. Pig raising, as distinct from owning, brings money when the pig is eventually sold by the owner. But now many are doing it, so the return is low.

Payment used to be 10,000R for morning ploughing (a job done by men), now only 7,000R. Rich people buy machines to plough faster, requiring less labour. Transplanting (done by women) used to pay 3,000R, now it pays 2,500R a day. Selling labour is possible only for a month or so a year.

“I earn 2500 R per day transplanting, but my daughter only earns 1000 R (25c) as they claim she’s not experienced.”

On the other hand, a household headed by a woman needs to hire labour to do many things. Therefore, the situation for women is harder as they need to hire male labour.

Credit - All the groups found that credit was a common problem.

World Bank: Abolish subsidised, low-interest credit, it is “unfair competition to international best practice microfinance programs based on market interest rates”

One family borrowed from ACLEDA at 4% per month (48% per year). Because she could not pay back ACLEDA, she borrowed money from the moneylender at 20% interest a month in order to pay back ACLEDA. She still owes \$50 per month.

‘If we compare two families, one that gets credit and one that doesn’t, the family who gets credit is much worse off because they are always in debt.’

Credit is negotiated through the village chief, who decides who is credit-worthy. The chief is co-opted by the microfinance organisations to work for them. Poor people must join a group in order to obtain credit from microfinance outfits, including NGO’s. Other group members then become responsible for the repayment of the debt of other members. Causes increased poverty and strife.

Credit disenfranchises very poor people as they cannot take part in credit groups, lose face and stop participating in community activities. ‘ACLEDA claims to help the poor but they never lend to the really poor, you must have some assets’.

Normally the household head, meaning the man, is the official group member, though the wife participates more, but her name might go on list if the husband has been away for a long time.

The WB and ADB have pushed credit and micro-credit as ‘poverty alleviation’, and want to make it easier to mortgage land to gain credit. Yet losing land is exactly a reason the poor fear credit.

‘Some families have lost land due to debt. We haven’t, because when we are in debt, we sell everything else (jewellery for example), before we would sell land. We don’t want any more money from ACLEDA, if we can’t repay, they will take our land.’

World Bank: Remove ceilings on land holdings, which prevent 'efficient' farmers gaining more land; bring about "a functioning market in land-use rights" and allow banks "to transfer these rights at market value." "Those few" who lose their land can be covered by "social safety nets."

Land – Most people on first day had no land, but difficult to work out why. Some never had any, others have lost it over time, some only had residential rather than agricultural land. According to one family with only residential land, they had agricultural land across the river in neighbouring Kandal province, but under Pol Pot, it was redistributed to the neighbouring commune. Another land distribution after Pol Pot was based on number of family members – as they only had three at the time, they got little, and there has been no further distribution.

"Our family has a small dry rice field, but can only produce enough rice for 3 months, then we have to buy rice – if we borrow rice we have to pay back double. We sell no rice, we only eat it or save some for next season's seeds."

"We have 300 square metres of rice land, enough for only 6 months (household of 2), then we have to buy. We currently have no rice land,

World Bank: Export more rice, so farmers can get better prices, so "farm incomes, including those of the poor, who are most dependent on selling rice, would rise"

In fact the poor with little or no rice land have to buy rice all or most of the year. "The price of straw rice has increased from 350 to 500 R per kilo, and the price of white rice has increased from 800 to 1200-1400 per kilo."

Risky cash ventures - One woman sold all their property to buy 300 ducks, but the business flopped (not enough people to buy the ducks). They lost everything they had invested. They are not in debt, but they have nothing, on the edge of destitution and will go over the edge if there were a crisis. She borrows rice from the shop. Her husband is an electrician. If the family cannot pay back the rice, shop owner may receive free services from the husband as compensation.

Natural resources are hard to access because of the increasing selling off of natural resources by the government to private corporations, which then limit access to it. They also strip the land of resources, destroying the environment. There are less fish in the river than before, the water level has dropped, the water is less clean than before (increased fertiliser use upstream?)

"Catching fish in the river has become more difficult. Only small fish can be caught. The fishing lot owner is wealthy and he restricts our access to the fish by building barriers. We have to go further upstream which is time consuming and exposes our children to danger, as they have to fish by themselves. While mothers are worried about their children, they have to think of other means to feed their families"
"The price of fish has risen in the last 3 months from 5000R to 6500 R per kilo."

Many people now prefer tile or concrete for building, so those reliant on growing palm thatch for roofing have no money to get transportation to other villages to sell their thatching. A 56 year old woman has been making palm thatch for the past 5 years – business has now dried up.

‘There is not enough fuel wood available anymore and we are now using coconut husks and leaves. Even collecting fuel wood in the forest by crossing the river is not allowed anymore as it belongs to a private concession. Usually it is us wives and children who collect wood, rice straw and dried grass for cooking’



Migration Issues

Most girls in the village have gone to work in factories around Phnom Penh, while many men have gone to become motorbike taxi drivers.

‘Our daughter is a maid in Phnom Penh, working for 40,000R (\$10) a month. When she sends home money, it’s only enough to cover my husband’s medical expenses, he had a stroke and can’t use one arm. She became a maid because we could not afford the \$50 entrance fee for a garment factory, nor could we afford sewing classes.’

Another family has two daughters working in garment factories. One who has been there for five years was at home on annual leave: **‘The company paid me a total of \$1.50 for the whole 10 days annual leave’**. The family had to borrow money for the entrance fees to the factory, and is still in debt to a moneylender with very high interest. ‘I work 7am to 6pm, 6 days a week. I receive \$50 a month including overtime, but my starting salary was only \$20. **Working in the factory is like a prison, there’s no freedom, and often not enough to send anything home’**.

Gender specific:

Discrimination against women is frequent as shown through the favouritism of providing education for boys when family doesn’t have enough money for all children. Most girls finish when 8 years old in 3-4 grade. Boys finish when 15 years old in grade 7. This leads to girls having to accept lower skilled work and generally having less life opportunities than boys.

One woman kicked her husband out 20 years ago because he was gambling. Her 3 daughters all work in garment factories. Two are still there, but one came back to the village and got married. Despite having 3 wonderful girls who help their family, this mother continued to want boys.

Exchanging goods for rice can sometimes be a preferred option for women. At times, if given money, the husband uses it to buy rice wine and will get drunk and frequently beat his wife.

Birth control is exclusively the responsibility of women. One woman was trained as a nurse. She makes some money by giving injections and charging a cheaper rate than the health clinic. Unclear was whether her business was mostly made up of women seeking birth control.

Post-field discussion

Changing position of women - In the last few years, there is the beginning of a change in attitude towards girls, in large part because of the garment industry. Families with 2 or 3 girls in garment factories often start to improve their living situations. This often results in families increasing their respect for girls because they send money back regularly, while the boys do not. Yet girls are still heavily stigmatized, and don't have much of a life themselves.

Thailand is an example of 'globalization being built on the backs of women'. Market-driven land concentration, landlessness and other deregulation and development promoting rural poverty led to huge explosion of sex work. Sex workers may have made significant contribution to poverty reduction in villages they sent cash back to. Yet it is these women who pay the price (stigma, difficult life afterwards, physical danger, spread of HIV). Estimated that very large percentage of Thailand's GDP is connected to the sex industry (including a large part of the entertainment and tourism industry built to cater to the sex industry).

We asked women if they had any aspirations in their lives. Most shook their heads, many became emotional and cried. It was too painful to have dreams because they feel it is not possible to achieve them. Some just wanted enough money to feed their families. Among the poor, few think about the future, focus exclusively on surviving day-to-day.

Women often accept jobs they can get, no matter how dangerous, to support their families. One woman worked in the rice paddy fields during the flooding, which is very dangerous – the owners don't normally employ labour, but only employ others when it is dangerous!

While women are increasingly engaged in seasonal migration, even older women in their 50's, their husbands are also migrating, working as motorbike taxi drivers, often staying away longer. Families are aware of the dangers that exist, for example, one woman's husband broke his leg working as a motor-taxi driver. She talked to her husband about HIV/AIDS and the need to use condoms before he left - when they return, many men infect their wives with HIV.

One enormous change is that many families have stopped forcing their daughters to get married because they are afraid of HIV. A physician at the clinic said that he knew of a

few people who were HIV positive, but they never came to get help, they generally kept quiet about their status.

Levels of understanding. Villagers don't relate their problems to international policies, but many connect them to increasing gaps between rich and poor. Many families were very clear on the dangers of micro-credit. A woman having trouble selling her cakes understood that it was because her customers were becoming poorer and because more people were also selling cakes.

Some grow and sell sugar palm trees for 8,000R, and the people who can afford to buy and cut and sell to people to build houses at 8 times that price can 'maintain power over us [the poor]' according to one villager.

One woman was very aware of the long-term effect of fertilizer. At first you have higher yields, but eventually you are dependent on fertilizer to have any yield at all, so she avoids it. Now they use a lot of natural fertiliser. Also, chemical fertilisers and pesticides are too expensive. They began using chemical fertilisers when they heard it produced a higher yield, but in practice it doesn't. The price has risen from 800 to 1000 R per kilogram.

On the other hand, when asked about the reason for the recent decline of fish in the river, and decline of water quality, people did not know why, or why the price of rice and fertiliser was rising. They understood water was expensive because its distribution was privatised, and that this was because the river level had fallen, but did not know why the river level had fallen.

One woman understood that her poverty was connected to vulnerability and violence. She had been raped by the village chief. When she protested, she got a sack of rice as compensation. "At that time, I was very poor. My house was in poor condition and was on the ground (not on stilts), so it was insecure and easy to enter. Also, being very poor, I was discriminated against in the village so it was easier to get away with the action."



Summary of Major Issues Arising

1. There are no education or health subsidies, whereas in the past there were – the government has shifted priorities under pressure from the lenders. Major cause of poverty and debt.
2. There are no mass organisations or formal support networks – former mass organisations have been coopted or dissolved. Example of former Womens Union, which was turned into an NGO, took over Womens Union building and assets, now has a magnificent building in PP while lending to women at 5% per month interest!
3. The state structure itself is being coopted by business interests – example of the village chief being coopted by microfinance companies
4. Corporatisation/leasing of public utilities – private TNC's run their businesses using government buildings and infrastructure. The government borrows money from IMF/WB to build infrastructure, government has to repay loans, private TNC profits from fees for service and sends money to shareholders overseas. At village level we see lack of electricity due to lack of interest by profit oriented corporations, while local water is in private hands
5. Credit (microfinance) is a major problem for the poor. Interest rates are outrageous, the really poor are excluded from, those with meagre assets become enslaved to debt and lose land.
6. Land – most villagers had little or no land, none had enough to cover basic food needs, had to scramble for money to buy rice, at rising prices. Most fertile land owned by “a few big guys”.
7. Labour market saturated – work means migration to garment factories, with exploitative conditions and entrance fees that bar the really poor, leaving sex work the other main option
8. Monopolisation of natural resources by private concessions upstream – resulting in lower water level of river, decline of seafood stocks, decline of water quality

Recommendations

Participants decided that the issue of recommendations, policies and actions to counter the impact of neo-liberal policies should be something for each of us to look for in our work in the coming period. At this stage, we merely put forward a few ideas which, following our experiences back in our own countries, may be the basis of a more coherent action plan. These ideas included:

1. When foreign corporations invest in utilities areas (water, electricity, telecommunications), we should demand that the governments' social priorities take precedence over the needs of investors, for example government policy to spread such services to poor areas despite lack of profit from such areas (in fact the need to subsidise those areas)
2. Demand rich countries stop dumping subsidised food on poor country markets – poor countries have the right to take whatever measures they like to counter this

3. Empowerment of social groups, mass organisations, including informal organisations, from local to national levels, to give voice to the poor
4. More 'capacity building' for the people at the bottom to keep all those above them (governments, bosses, "donors", NGO's etc) accountable, not just for middle class NGO's
5. Establishing links to trade unions and other forms of workers' self-organisation, particularly among women workers
6. Looking into how farmers' cooperatives can help poor farmers organise for better prices and resist exploitation, and pool resources to diversify while maintaining food security - study the actual roles of farmers' organisations in the various countries, or whether they exist at all
7. Pushing for new land distributions when land concentration and landlessness are becoming serious – rural people have a basic right to land to grow food
8. Building alliances with workers', farmers', environmental, citizens' movements in other countries, and looking at building such alliances in the north – there are many farmers movements, cooperatives and trade unions there also opposed to the new economic order
9. Raising public awareness of these issues in our countries, and in particular raising awareness among poor and landless farmers and workers, especially women and migrant workers, about what is causing their situation



This report is a synthesis of the views and findings of participants at the Gender and Trade Workshop held in Phnom Penh over June 23-30, 2003, under the auspices of Womens Agenda for Change/Oxfam Hong Kong Cambodia.

The report was synthesised by Michael Karadjis and Rosanna Barbero

**Gender and Trade Workshop
23-30 June 2003, Phnom Penh**

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