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## **The Gender Dimension in Environment and Development Policy: The Southeast Asian Experience**

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The environmental crisis and the feminisation of poverty This paper sets out to show how the environmental crisis and the feminisation of poverty are actually one inter- related crisis.<sup>1</sup> Both situations have been brought about by the same process\_ namely, economic growth based fundamentally on resource extraction. It should be realised that the environment is not just 'nature out there' but a habitat containing the livelihood resources of local communities. So when environmental resources are extracted, depleted or degraded, what is affected is the livelihood

resource base of local communities.

Women, in particular, experience this process of resource loss. The gender-differentiated impact of resource loss can be understood in terms of men and women having different 'life-spaces'. A 'life-space' is a socio- ecological context that enables life processes to go on.

Women's lifespaces and men's lifespaces are very different. Even though men and women may be living in the same household, they do not occupy the same lifespace. (Kettel 1995: 63)

Living in direct interaction with the natural environment, women in rural and indigenous communities often become triply disadvantaged by the ecological crisis:

ú The loss of land, food, water, shelter, fuel and fodder means a loss of livelihoods for women, more so than for men. Women are more vulnerable to the loss of the household resource base, because the livelihood activities under their management tend to be resource-based, rather than money-based. Women in the rural and forest sectors are critically affected by environmental degradation. Deforestation, the scarcity of fuel wood, and the loss of common property resources directly affect women (see Heyzer 1987: 3-4).

ú Even in a situation of relative gender equality where women do have traditional rights over land and resources, their rights are often ignored by the authorities. Consequently, when communal land is acquired by governments and businesses, any monetary compensation that is dispensed often goes only to men as 'heads of households', who are therefore treated as the sole owners and users of land. Similarly, when resettlement takes place, any title over a new piece of land often goes only to men. Women are thus doubly dispossessed when communal land and resources are lost. Not only do they lose their resource base, they also lose out on monetary compensations and new land titles (see Hew & Kedit 1987, and Kumar 1987).

ú Women are often constrained by traditional gender inequities from taking up economic alternatives and job opportunities. Most of these are skewed in favour of able-bodied young men, who are the easily mobile members of the local community. This often leads to male abandonment and to the resulting increase in female-headed households who have to fend for themselves on a depleted resource base. World-wide, there is a rapid increase in the number of female-headed households. (See The UN Commission on the Status of Women 1995: Paragraph 100).

## The Iban women's loss of land

The building of the Batang Ai hydro-electric dam in Sarawak led to the resettlement of the indigenous Iban community. This has led to severe ecological, social, cultural and economic disruptions for the people, especially the women who have lost all traditional rights to land and other resources. In traditional Iban custom, men and women work equally in padi planting, acquire land rights and settlement rights equally and inherit property equally. In the process of resettlement, however, all this has changed. The compensation money (ranging from M\$10,000 to M\$400,000) was mostly given only to the men, under the planners' false assumption that the men were the "heads of households".

With the commercialisation of agriculture and SALCRA's [Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority] policy of one certificate of ownership to a household, women's rights over land have been abrogated and a dependency relationship created.... One of the most traumatic effects of resettlement for the women settlers is that they have no land to plant paddy.... Most settlers continued to grow paddy on SALCRA land when they first moved into the area as commercial crops were yet to be planted. However, this is now no longer possible as the land is now planted with cocoa and rubber. There is now a rising desperation among the women to find land as their paddy pun (sacred paddy) has to be planted every year for perpetuity. This is because traditionally women are the custodians of the paddy pun (Hew and Kedit 1987:188, 192).

Women in rural and indigenous communities are thus confronted by a crisis of survival on two related levels:

- ú On the ecological level\_the loss and degradation of their livelihood resource base
  - ú On the economic level\_the feminisation of poverty or the increasing impoverishment of women.
- Women's resource loss and their increasing impoverishment have to be understood at three levels:
- ú In terms of persisting gender inequities derived from the historical past, which have traditionally subordinated women
  - ú In terms of the reinforcement of existing inequities to serve the context of the present, such that women are excluded and disenfranchised from increasingly scarce resources
  - ú In terms of new processes that have resulted in women's loss of livelihood resources and that instead objectify women as resources to be appropriated.
- Many traditional societies have existing gender hierarchies, expressed through descent, kinship and religion, that discriminate against women. Systems of male inheritance, for example, conveniently dispossess and disenfranchise half the population\_namely, women. Gender inequity is thereby institutionalised and the gains of the 'haves' are assured by excluding the 'have-nots' from competition. Impoverishment and

disenfranchisement thus go together (see Heyzer 1987: 4).

Women in traditional societies are disadvantaged in relation to the male family members, in the satisfaction of basic needs, and in their access to and control over resources (see Kelkar 1987 and Agarwal 1988). They are seen to have:

- ú Fewer or even no land rights
- ú Fewer economic rights, such as the right to earn a wage or the right to trade
- ú Fewer legal and customary rights, such as the right to choose a marriage partner
- ú Fewer social and cultural entitlements that give a sense of well-being and self-worth, such as access to rituals, sacred spaces, and masculinised bodies of knowledge
- ú Less access to labour markets
- ú More household responsibilities.

As a result of these existing inequities, if women lose their household resource base, they experience impoverishment more profoundly than men. Even when resources are not scarce, distribution already tends to become more gender-biased. When resources become scarce, women's assets are often sold before men's assets. Women often end up having no land, fewer livelihood resources, less food, less health care, less education, and lower economic returns for their labour.

This situation is further aggravated by the introduction of certain forms of agro-technology which displace female labour without there being any compensatory new forms of employment.

## Case study 2

The technological marginalisation of rural women in agricultural production in the Philippines The changes in rice technology consisted of: (1) shift in type of seed from the traditional varieties to the short, early maturing ones produced by the International Rice Research Institute, (2) spread of farm mechanisation in the land-preparation and threshing tasks, and (3) changes in certain farm practices such as extensive use of fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides and method of direct seeding....

Technological changes displaced more women relative to men. Under the old technology, almost half of the labourers working in a hectare of rice land...were women. However, by 1986, only 36 per cent in Bo. Lalangan and 29 per cent in Bo. Tabon were females.... The fact that displacement has occurred in the absence of other job opportunities implies the severely constricted nature of employment opportunities in these areas.... For a number of women in the two villages, however, mechanisation of the threshing operations created [peripheral] tasks which ... were associated with the subsistence activities women had in the past engaged in. As the mechanical thresher blows out the hay stack, women place a plastic mat or net on the ground to catch the falling grains or hay that come with it.... Once this is done, they separate the hay stalks from the grain, a process which must be undertaken right away because the thresher spews out more hay stalk.... Whatever the women got were milled for home consumption.... The worsening unemployment and displacement of women even in other villages and towns increased competition for the marginal job.... The collection and processing of left-over grains...symbolises the relegation of women to the left- over employment

opportunities of men: [it] is the rural counterpart of urban scavenging. (Banzon-Bautista and Dungo 1987:280, 285, 287-9).

This case study illustrates the ability of economically marginalised rural women to make something out of nothing by converting a waste by-product of the mechanical thresher into a food resource for their families. Nevertheless, the economic marginalisation of women has repercussions on the welfare of themselves and their children, as the family still remains the responsibility of the women and "the burden of recoupling the budget and meeting cash shortages seems to fall on women" (Banzon-Bautista and Dungo 1987:307). Such efforts to make something out of nothing are, in many cases, borne out of necessity, demanding labour-intensive drudgery.

"A woman anthropologist at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines had the sensitivity to observe how male categories of 'efficiency' created the mechanisation imperative. Barog, a process of shaving off the already beaten stalks of rice to glean the grain that remains, used to be undertaken by women who did this in between childcare and cooking. They kept all the grain they got (none going to the owner of the field) which at times, was as high as 10 per cent of the total yield. Mechanising the barog process was inspired because the male IRRI scientists saw women's gain as 'loss'. The woman anthropologist asks, "How can IRRI defend counting barog grain as a 'loss'? It is true that the field owner does not get his hands on it. But the fact that the grain passes out of his hands does not reflect the technical inefficiency of the traditional method. The barog grain is by no means 'lost' either to the national economy or to the production system itself. Village families eat it\_ and what makes our report more embarrassing, it is usually the poorest villagers that eat. At best our failure to credit the traditional system with this gain reflects an evaluation of rice in terms of money rather than consumable food." ("From a woman anthropologist's note-pad: IRRI memos", Balai no.7, 1983, quoted from Shiva 1989:111).

Women's indigenous knowledge of livelihood resources is founded precisely on their multiple roles and responsibilities, in relation to the care of their children, the cooking of food, the management of scarce resources, and their own survival as the disadvantaged members of an inequitable society. This is why in rural communities, women's knowledge of biodiversity is very often different and more comprehensive than men's knowledge. For example, women's botanical knowledge would tend to include a maximal number of edible plants, including otherwise poisonous plants that can be made edible through food processing, as well as medicinal herbs and rare plants that may be useful in periods of scarcity. In contrast, men's botanical knowledge tends to focus on plants that are used as staples and those that can be marketed as cash crops.

Women's vital knowledge of livelihood resources is generally ignored by the mainstream economy. The shadow ecology and shadow economy based on women's indigenous knowledge now need to come into the sunshine, particularly in the context of our current environmental crisis, brought about by the over-consumption and wastage of resources. In the search for sustainable development alternatives that are sustainable for all sectors of society, women have a crucial role to play, since at micro and community levels, they are usually the managers of local resources on which everyday life depends. This significant managerial role should be duly acknowledged and integrated in the formulation of rural development policies and programmes, especially those aimed at smallholder agricultural production.

But even though women are half the world and even though they play a vital role in society, they are

usually considered a social and political minority whose needs and perspectives are seldom included at a macro level. The convergence between traditional gender hierarchies and new patterns of gender inequities is a major factor leading to the feminisation of poverty, such that more and more women end up as the poorest of the poor living on increasingly depleted resources. In extreme cases of poverty, not only do girls and women lose their access to resources, they themselves may even become the resources of others. Where children are sold off as a family resource, it is the daughter, not the son, who is the first to be sold.

The direct connection between unsustainable growth, resource depletion and women's impoverishment is almost never recognised. It is not surprising, therefore, that the crisis in the region is worsening, especially in the context of rapid economic growth in Southeast Asia. The commodification and degradation of environmental resources have led to the destruction of livelihood resources upon which depend the livelihoods of local communities, especially women. On the one hand, wealth is generated for certain sectors of society, especially those benefitting from the commodification of resources. On the other hand, poverty is also increasing in other sectors of society, especially for rural communities whose livelihood resource base is reduced, depleted or taken away altogether.

While urban middle and upper classes are still relatively insulated from the loss and degradation of livelihood resources, rural and indigenous communities are experiencing massive impoverishment through the dispossession of land and livelihood resources.

More than 550 million, or 60 per cent of the world's rural population live below the poverty line in rural areas. (Women in a Changing Global Economy 1995: 34)

As a consequence of the loss of land and resources, the poor are forced to depend on a reduced ecological base, thereby increasing pressures on the use of natural resources in terms of land, water, food, fuel, fodder, shelter and other livelihood needs. As shown above, this livelihood crisis is particularly acute for rural women who play a vital social as resource managers, subsistence farmers and as primary care givers. In the developing countries, world-wide, the number of rural women living in poverty have increased by 50 per cent compared to 30 per cent for men. (See the UN Commission on the Status of Women 1995: Paragraph 97).

When even the depleted resource base becomes untenable, massive rural-urban migration follows, resulting in the concentration of population in urban centres. World-wide, the average annual population increase from 1960-1990 for urban populations is twice that of rural populations (World Resources Institute 1992: 264).

The world's urban population is estimated to have grown by about 500 million people over the period 1975-1985 and about half of this gain has been attributed to net rural-urban migration. Recent estimates suggest that 43% of the world's population currently live in urban areas, compared with 37% in 1970. (UN Commission on the Status of Women 1995: 25)

In many cases, the rural poor have become the urban poor, from whom has emerged a pool of cheap reserve labour which has the effect of dragging down wages and working conditions in the cities. Living conditions for the urban poor who may have even fewer rights to land and resources than the

rural poor are usually dismal, with critical needs for better housing, water supply and sanitation. If this rural-urban process of resource transfer and migration were to continue, it would eventually lead to an implosion. As more people in the rural sector become impoverished, and as more move to towns and cities, there would no longer be a viable rural sector.

The gap in urban-rural realities is also true for women globally. Over the last four decades, some middle and upper-class women in the urban sector have undoubtedly experienced positive changes. They have had higher education, increased employment opportunities, and an improvement in income and status. But these improvements are piece-meal.

On the whole, the lives of poor women in urban, rural and indigenous communities are increasingly at risk, because their livelihood resources have become increasingly scarce. As a result, women's work burden has increased in inverse proportion to the depletion and loss of livelihood resources.

Women have become steadily poorer in the context of an increasingly merciless struggle for scarce resources and a denser concentration of wealth at the top. Women produce half the world's food, yet constitute 70 per cent of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, but own less than 1 per cent of the world's property.

Globally, women's participation in the labour force has increased by only 3 per cent in 20 years, from 37 per cent in 1970 to 40 per cent in 1990. Overall, women still have only 36 per cent of total waged employment and only one-third of the share of national income. Women's wages are generally only three-quarters of men's wages in the non-agricultural sector in 56 countries. Women receive only a very small percentage of credit from formal credit institutions.

Why has this happened? Why do women work the hardest and end up as the poorest? Why has women's work vital as it is not generated wealth for them?

One answer to these questions is as follows. Women do not obtain the full benefit of their own work. Many women work for the benefit of others. Thus, many women work on land that is not theirs and that they will not inherit. They manage homes that they do not own. This happens despite the fact that their role as resource managers has been lauded in the UN Conference on Environment and Development and other international conferences. This context of resource loss, dispossession and impoverishment frames any discussion of women, environment and development.

As stated by Heyzer (1994: 2-3),

The challenge of maintaining sustainable livelihoods in a degrading environment is a gender-differentiated challenge. Environmental degradation exacts higher costs on women than on men. In a world that is still largely rural, women are the main subsistence farmers of Africa, Asia and South America. At an everyday level, these women farmers are facing the challenge of maintaining sustainable livelihoods for themselves, their families and their communities, as their resource base of fuel, water and food becomes increasingly depleted.

Sustainability and equity are intrinsically related. If sustainable and equitable development is to be achieved at all, a priority issue that must be addressed is women's rights over land, resources, and

the means of livelihood. There can be no sustainability if half the world's population are deprived and dispossessed of livelihood resources by putting women's livelihood rights at risk. Women's rights as indivisible and inalienable human rights\_including their personal, economic, political and all other rights as full human persons\_are therefore a developmental issue of crucial importance.

### Feminised poverty as a labour resource

As shown above, poverty is a gendered phenomenon, claiming more women than men. On the one hand, women's impoverishment is the result of traditional gender hierarchies. On the other hand, however, the feminisation of poverty is more than just a residual category. It is an actively reproduced 'shadow subsidy' that lowers the costs of production and enhances profit margins. Because of an inherent compatibility with traditional gender hierarchies, market-dominated development processes have generally not been beneficial to women.

Even when these processes have generated employment for women, it has been under conditions of low wages, numerous occupational hazards and poor working conditions. The under-valued labour of women is a crucial resource which drives rapid industrialisation and economic expansion. It is precisely because this resource is being exploited that the returns for employers are high. Women also suffer disproportionately from economies undergoing restructuring and stiff competition from abroad, because this intensifies the profit motive through cost-cutting. Many women in Southeast Asia, for example, have been recruited into the lowest jobs in the industrial production, where wages are inadequate and working conditions hazardous.

### Case study 3

Cheap labour = cheap lives

Factory fires have been a common phenomenon. For example, in 1993, a Hong Kong-owned factory in Bangkok, Kader Industrial, caught fire killing 189 workers and injuring 500 others. Most of the victims were young women. They died mainly because most of the safety exits were locked by the factory management, allegedly to stop workers from trying to steal the stuffed toys they were making for export (see Newsweek 4 May 1994 and The New Internationalist January 1995).

The high-growth economies have benefitted from the use of women's labour as a low-waged, malleable pool of reserve labour that can be hired and fired at will. As a result, women are more often found in casual forms of labour in the informal sector of the economy. In order to survive, women often have to subject themselves to exploitative situations, where their labour and their bodies are used and abused to generate profits for others.

If their gender-biased disadvantages and domestic responsibilities are not addressed as a prior issue, then when women enter the labour market, they do so with a number of disadvantages:

- ú They have fewer marketable skills, having been hindered in their formal education and the acquisition of new technological skills
- ú Their employment opportunities tend to be confined



to the lower-waged and more casual segments of the labour market as a result of their relative lack of education and skills

ú They continue to experience discrimination at the workplace and find it hard to achieve career development and upward mobility

ú Their employment outside the home does not lead to a redistribution of household duties between men and women, because women's paid employment is often culturally constructed as a privilege, and not an inherent right, accorded by male family members who control their labour

ú Even with waged employment, women continue to be expected to fulfil their traditional responsibilities for household maintenance and the care of family members, such that they have to work both inside and outside the home, resulting in an increased workload known as the 'double burden'.

Women now constitute a significant proportion of the migrant labour trade. This has gendered implications for the work of social reproduction. A pertinent question that seldom gets asked is: 'who does the work of social reproduction in the poorer countries from which the migrant workers come?' If the governments of the richer governments are already reluctant to invest in the care of their citizens and rely on individual households to make their own arrangements, are the governments of the poorer countries more willing or more able to do so? Or does the absence of women in the household lead to a change in the gender division of labour, such that the men come to share the responsibility of work and housework?

Research indicates that usually, the domestic workload of the migrant female worker is shifted to other women and girls, generally unpaid family members\_such as unmarried daughters, sisters and aunts, or mothers, mothers-in-law and grandmothers. The burden of housework, child-care and other dimensions of social reproduction thus continues to be seen as the sole responsibility of girls and women, rather than as the shared responsibility of both men and women, or the shared responsibility of family and the state. This leads to an increase in unpaid female labour with its attendant consequences, such as the educational and employment deprivation of the unpaid female worker. This, in turn, leads to the transmission of female poverty and the tendency towards a higher fertility rate. Poverty through deprivation thus passes from female to female within the family and across generations.

The transmission of poverty from one generation to the next includes the transmission of gender injustice, where it is the girl child whose rights to life and her own person are not assured. First of all, the girl child born into poverty is more likely to suffer an early death\_either through deliberate infanticide or through\_less deliberate but no less fatal\_infant mortality, deprivation of food, clothes and health care. If a girl child is allowed to live, she is often vulnerable to abuse, condemned to remain illiterate, or reduced to being a family resource to be sold into bondage\_whether as child-bride, prostitute or debt-slave.

Since the burden of ensuring the survival of a dependent member of the family is seen as a female responsibility, the life-trajectories of sons and daughters are altered by this gender asymmetry. Sons

are bestowed the family's scarce resources so that they can escape from the poverty trap. Daughters, on the other hand, are deprived of these scarce resources, held back from school and expected to be the family's secondary nurturers, assisting in the care of siblings and other needy members of the family. Hence, girls start bearing the burden of social reproduction from an early age and are hindered from the pursuit of economic alternatives. This has severe consequences for the inter-generational transmission of poverty, as girls born into poverty are brought up to be women who will remain in poverty. But such a poverty trap cannot be broken if there are vested interests deriving economic and social advantage from such a situation.

Women and the environment as 'shadow subsidies' As noted by Joan Martin Brown (quoted from Ofosu-Amaah 1995),

Women and the environment are the 'shadow subsidies' which support all societies. Both are undervalued or perceived as free, even while others profit from them. The greatest challenge (now) is how to revise the valuing of nature and women so as to take proper account of them in decision making. Until societies are able to integrate the 'value' of women and the environment within their economic formulations, all their efforts will address only symptoms, not causes. The current hierarchical, separatist, competitive and predatory social and economic arrangements which dominate in most societies are antithetical to the realisation of the contributions of nature and women to their societies.

The fundamental cause of the present crisis is a mode of development based on resource extraction that exploits women and the environment as free goods. This mode of development is the foundation of a power structure that eats into the ecological and social system on which it depends. Those who benefit most from this economic and political structure have done their best to pass the cost to others. Those who are bearing the costs are women, the poor and future generations.

Unfortunately, despite this escalating crisis, in mainstream policy-making, there has been no fundamental rethinking of the development model and the global economic system. No attention has been given to the possibility that the existing economic order based on the intensive extraction of resources and on rapid industrialisation using cheap labour may be responsible for the destruction of existing livelihood systems, especially women's livelihoods. Furthermore, there seems to be neither recognition nor restructuring of the vicious cycle that has emerged, connecting international debt, enforced repayments, structural adjustments, the increased exports of natural resources, the destruction of the resource base of local communities, and widespread impoverishment.

These gaps in response to the existing crisis could lead to inadequate strategies that may compound problems. Thus, it is commonly assumed by governments and citizens alike, that economic growth will finance strategies for bringing about sustainable and equitable development. However, there is no mention of the patterns and effects of growth, no questioning of who would benefit and who would bear the cost of such growth. There is no acknowledgement that the process of growth itself could exacerbate the very conditions that it is supposed to ameliorate.

As noted by Peggy Antrobus (1995) of DAWN,<sup>2</sup>

there is no analysis of the contradictory trends of the past 15 years. The problem stems from a lack of a coherent analysis and an unwillingness to acknowledge that the current global model of economic growth does not create an enabling environment for the elimination of poverty, the creation of productive employment, or the promotion of social integration since it places the

interests of international capital before that of people.

Over the last fifteen years and more, the crisis of unsustainability and inequity has deepened. To call for an increase of the very same processes of economic growth as a solution to the problem would only compound the situation. It is therefore important to question how and why we have come to the current ecological and social crisis. What has brought about ecological unsustainability? Why have disparities between wealth and impoverishment increased? Why is there a global feminisation of poverty?

While mainstream economics propose that poverty be addressed through economic 'progress', this dominant development framework, based on profit-driven economics, simply does not and cannot address this ecological and social crisis of our time. As summarised by Sen (1994: 9),

Neo-conservative economists, neo-liberals and Reaganites argue that there is no need for concern in respect of either capital formation or the depletion of resources for development. These problems, they say, will be taken care of by the market since prices for endangered resources will rise leading to both conservation and substitution via technological change.

The neo-conservative and neo-liberal argument is flawed, because it does not take into account how environmental degradation may not be an economic problem, but may instead be treated as an economic opportunity. It propels businesses and industries from resource-depleted areas to seek new stocks of resources in virgin territories. Profit margins can be increased by selling these still cheap resources from somebody else's habitat in one's own resource-depleted market.

Economic value is thus generated out of scarcity and every degraded natural resource creates a potential market niche for a scarce product. For example, polluted water creates a market niche for bottled mineral water. Polluted air creates a market niche for ionisers. Polluted seas create a market niche for the import of frozen sea food from some other community's unpolluted waters, thereby depleting their fish stocks. Not only does this mode of product substitution leave the ongoing process of resource degradation untouched, it depletes further other resources and other people's natural supply.

In the same way, poverty may be a life-and-death issue for the poor, but may not be a problem for those who stand to benefit from this kind of economic system. It simply creates a pool of cheap labour willing to work for starvation wages. Similarly, the impoverishment of women creates a segmented labour market, where the unpaid or lowly-paid women's labour in the informal sector will constantly drive their formal wages downwards. The market is therefore unable to solve the problems of our time since the market does not respond to social and ecological needs. On the contrary, the market has brought about this present crisis.

Because the market only responds to those who have the capacity to participate in it, it cannot, then,

respond to the poor. Nor can it, in view of technologies that are now being produced, generate jobs. It creates alienation that leads to social disintegration. Because of women's primary responsibility for the care of the people, women are most affected by the consequences of a model of development characterised by increasing poverty and unemployment, alienation, and violence.

(Antrobus 1995: 12)

An increasingly commodified and monetised world fails to recognise the intrinsic worth of all aspects of human life, of what should not belong in the market. These are instead treated as cheap or free resources to be profited from. Somebody's loss is someone else's gain. Communal land, free-standing forests, women's biological and social reproduction are 'up for grabs' in an exchange- dominated economic system where everything has a price and nothing has any intrinsic value.

Communal land can be appropriated as a free good from indigenous communities who have been living there for centuries, but have no title deeds. Forests can be designated as timber concessions with free wood to be felled. Women can be defined as creatures of tradition whose 'natural destiny' is to serve and please men, family and community. Their labour can be freely appropriated with no accountability to them. Indeed, an economy that appropriates and then locks up livelihood resources through a pricing mechanism, tends to breed violence as an alternative means of accessing resources.

The consequences of this economic calculation on environment and society are enormous. Herein lies the motivation to use and to continue using 'shadow subsidies' derived from nature and women's labour. Often, a growth spurt takes place when some hitherto untapped reserves of environmental resources and women's labour are suddenly discovered and drawn upon. When such growth spurts occur, they should be analysed in terms of their expanding resource use, and not simply treated as unexplained windfalls. Even lottery windfalls come from bets that have been placed; 'something cannot come from nothing'. Rapid economic growth thus means a rapidly growing resource hinterland, that expands into the ecological spaces of other economies, other communities\_ especially if the latter are not growing so rapidly themselves.

The economic status quo can be likened to a global pyramid, whereby those at the top feed on the resources of those at the bottom. Where are women located in this pyramid? Globally, and also in the Southeast Asian region as a whole, the majority of women are overwhelming at the base of this pyramid. As competition for scarce resources increase, women are being pushed further and further down this pyramid. The concentration of wealth at the top of this pyramid is getting denser, while poverty increases for those at the bottom.

Environmental degradation, the loss of community livelihoods, and the impoverishment of women thus go hand in hand. These are not accidents or ad hoc side effects. They are systemic processes in what is fundamentally a parasitic economy propped up by appropriated 'shadow subsidies'. Such a system is clearly unsustainable for the environment, for the poor, for women, and ultimately, for everyone living on this finite planet.

## Unbalanced growth in Southeast Asia

The Southeast Asian region is experiencing one of the fastest rates of economic growth in the world today. For example, the GDP growth rates of some economies in the region are:

- \_Malaysia at 9.3 per cent
- \_Thailand at 8.5 per cent
- \_Singapore at 8.1 per cent
- \_Indonesia at 7.4 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

The transitional economies of Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are also growing at full speed, registering strong GDP growth within the range of 7 to 8 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this, poverty in Southeast Asia remains a big problem. The development experiences within and between countries have by no means been homogenous. While many economies are growing at seemingly miraculous rates, these are the very countries that continue to have alarming rates of poverty. Three of the ten countries in the world with the largest number of poor come from the Southeast Asian region: Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Together, these three countries make up 9.3 per cent of the world's poor.<sup>5</sup> Poverty in the Philippines is so acute that 70 per cent of the farming population earn too little to even afford a proper diet.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, despite the region's rapid growth, a number of countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines are still saddled by heavy debts.

The disparities of wealth exist not only between countries but also within countries. In Indonesia, for example, the rich earn 8 to 10 times as much as the poor. Indonesia has been ranked by the International Monetary Fund as the world's 12th largest economy in terms of 'purchasing power parity' (that is, how much people can actually buy with their money), yet Indonesia has a significant proportion of the world's poor.

Poverty is closely connected with landlessness. In the Philippines, 5 per cent of farming families own 80 per cent of the land. The vast majority are landless or sharecroppers. Furthermore, industrialisation has displaced what little land people have owned. 160,247 hectares of farmland have been converted to industrial, residential or commercial use.<sup>7</sup> This has brought massive rural poverty, leading to equally massive rural-urban migration, as a result of which there are now more than 1.2 million Philippines migrant workers all over the world, male and female. UNDP statistics show that 90 per cent of all seamen in the world are Filipinos.

Despite the reality of poverty, mainstream economic discourse in the nineties has concentrated on the exploding economic growth in the region. The experiences of poverty are given scant attention. Increased trade in the region has not been a solution to poverty. And rapid industrialisation has brought about enormous environmental problems, has taken away livelihood resources from communities and has capitalised on the cheap or free labour of women. Economic growth therefore brings with it impoverishment. They are the two sides of the same coin. However, this relationship is not always clearly visible, because the benefits and ill effects are generally felt by different groups of people in different sectors of society. For example, urban populations who benefit from the plentiful supply of cheap resources from the rural sector do not experience the process of rural impoverishment as a result of resource loss. For example, men who benefit from new job opportunities through economic expansion do not experience the process of women's

impoverishment as a result of gender inequities. Ironically, when indeed the issue of poverty is addressed, the solution most often proposed is to promote economic growth through the export of commodities and through industrialisation. The consequent destruction of the environment, loss of livelihood resources of communities and poverty are dealt with as separate issues.

The following tables give an indication of the extent of environment degradation and rural impoverishment in the region:

Table 1: Estimated Extent of Degraded Land (unit: 1,000 hectares)

Source: FAO 1995:88

The region has already reached the safe limits of horizontal expansion of agriculture, meaning that future needs can only be met by intensification, an option which will not be easy due to widespread land degradation. A major cause of degradation is erosion due to water and wind. Only a very limited area is free from soil-related constraints on agricultural production. These constraints include steeply sloping land, severe fertility limitation, mining of soil nutrients. (FAO/Netherlands Conference on Agriculture and Environment: Sustainable Agriculture and Development in Asia and the Pacific, Regional Document no. 2, 'S- Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, 15-19 April 1991)

At the same time, food demands are projected to increase: Rough estimates of the evolution of food crop demands by the population forecast that Asia as a whole should have an average food crop yield in equivalent cereals of 3.2 tons/hectare in the year 2010 and 4.75 tons/hectare in 2030 to cover minimum food requirements. To achieve such yields, the average available land will be 0.9 hectares/capita in 2010 and 0.6 hectares/capita in 2030. To maintain present average cereal production per capita between 1990 and 2030 in all other developing countries in Asia (without China), the average increase for the next 40 years should be 2.5 times higher than the yield increase observed between 1970 and 1990 (0.8 tons/hectare). This represents twice the efforts achieved during the Green Revolution. (FAO 1993: 5).

This impending food crisis is ominous for girls and women, whose share of food resources is usually disproportionately less than others. Famine too is a gendered phenomenon.

Table 2: Estimates of Forest Cover Area and Rate of Deforestation

Source: FAO 1995:88

Table 3: Forest Area Change During 1981-1990 in Southeast Asia

Source: FAO 1995:88

Massive deforestation brings about the loss of topsoil, landslides, floods, and changes in rainfall and climate patterns. These disturb the production of food crops, thereby affecting the food security of

rural communities. The resulting food shortage increases women's burden as resource managers who have to find ever scarcer alternatives.

Table 4: Rural/Urban Migration and Growth Rates

Source: FAO 1995:86

Table 5: Urban Population and Poverty

Source: FAO 1995:87

The expansion of cities and the concentration of resources in cities have led to poverty in the rural areas of many countries. Compared to wages earned in the urban areas, wages are poor in the rural regions. This is often because governments have a policy of keeping food costs low in order to sustain workers in the city as well as to keep up the migration of workers from the rural to the urban areas.

However, even in the cities, mass rural-urban migration has led to the rise of poverty in the urban centres. A significant proportion of the rural poor have become the urban poor. Many live in conditions of significant deprivation in slums, on streets, along drains. Some examples of the levels of deprivation of the major cities of Southeast Asia can be ascertained from the following:

- ú There are at least 25,000 children living on the streets in Hanoi<sup>8</sup> and some 20,000 child prostitutes in Vietnam.<sup>9</sup>
  - ú Jakarta has an incidence of about 50 per cent of urban poverty (Environment 1992: 116)
  - ú Bangkok has about 410 slum areas scattered in the city, with public water supply available only to half the city's population (Environment 1992: 116)
  - ú Kuala Lumpur's large and scattered slum population, though smaller in comparison to other cities in the region, is also susceptible to the lack of water, poor sanitation and infectious diseases (Environment 1992: 116)
- Manila in the Philippines is a city with more than half of its population living in slums. The environmental problems faced by slum dwellers include:
- ú Uncleared garbage and lack of access to waste disposal systems
  - ú Inadequate means of disposing sewage resulting in the contamination of immediate surrounds
  - ú Usage of untreated and polluted waters from contaminated rivers
  - ú Poor drainage systems and the risk of flooding
  - ú Susceptibility to infectious diseases.

#### Case study 4

##### Wealth and health disparities

In Manila, in a large squatter settlement (Tondo), the level of severe malnutrition among infants and young children is three times the level for non-squatter areas. Tondo's infant mortality rate is 210 per 1,000 live births compared to 76 for non-squatter areas in Manila. The proportion of people with tuberculosis in Tondo is nine times the average for non-squatter areas, while diarrhoea is twice as common. In Tondo, anaemia is twice as common and typhoid four times as common.

The health problems of the poor in urban slums are usually the result of environmental problems\_such as pollution by industry and vehicle traffic\_and the lack of infrastructural services\_such as running water and garbage disposal. These problems are exacerbated by governments unwilling or unable to abate pollution and provide services. Thus the poor are suffering ill- health because poverty has made them vulnerable to the environmental and physical effects of the consumption of the rich and the negligence of their governments. (Holmberg 1991: 11)

These health disparities also exist between the rural and urban sectors, where the rural population tend to be deprived of the determinants of general health:

- ú access to health care services
- ú adequate nutrition
- ú potable water
- ú sanitation
- ú adequate rest and relief from hard physical labour and drudgery.

The excessively high mortality rates among the rural population occur in a context of unequal life chances between rural and urban populations, between rich and poor. The poor health conditions of the rural population are indicated in the relatively high infant and child mortality rates, as compared with the urban population. This may be illustrated by the disparities in infant and child mortality rates<sup>10</sup> between rural and urban families<sup>11</sup> in four Southeast Asian countries, as shown in Table 1 below.

These death ratios give an indication of the uneven development processes occurring in the rural and urban sectors in many countries. As noted by Ruzicka (1984: 38,49):

High fertility and high mortality buttress each other.... Despite impressive improvements, in most low income countries of Asia, the bulk of deaths are still of children under five years of age.... Most are occurring from a rather limited number of largely related problems: immaturity (low birth weight) often related to mother's poor health and nutritional status and frequent childbearing;



malnutrition as an underlying or associated cause of a death which itself was due to infection (measles, lower respiratory infections, malaria); the synergistic effects of diarrhoeal disease and malnutrition.

In other words, significant numbers of children in the rural population die because their families are too poor to keep them alive, especially when their mothers are themselves malnourished and in bad health. Such health problems tend to affect women and children more than they affect men, because the former tend to be disadvantaged in terms of physical mobility that would allow them to escape from conditions endangering their health.

	Rural			Urban			Ratios		
	Neo-natal	Post-neonatal	Child	Neo-natal	Post-neonatal	Child	Neo-natal	Post-neonatal	Child
Indonesia	55	60	88	29	17	15	1.9	3.5	5.9
Malaysia	13	36	25	8	10	2	1.6	3.6	12.5
Philippines	22	55	75	16	18	9	1.4	3.1	8.3
Thailand	51	51	56	37	24	3	1.4	2.1	18.7

Source: Ruzicka 1984 (p.34)

The health problems affecting rural women and children are by no means limited to the four countries listed in Table 1 above. In Vietnam, for example, rural women and children are also at risk from nutritional disorders and infectious diseases (particularly diarrhoea, respiratory infections and malaria). The lack of potable water is a major contributor to the spread of infectious diseases.

Many of the prevalent diseases are water-borne and linked to the poor state of water and sanitation. Less than half the urban population and less than 10% of the rural population have access to a safe and adequate supply of water; the remainder depend on a combination of shallow wells, rain water, rain catchment and ponds and rivers. Many areas in the dry season, at this time water is traded at high prices and the use of polluted water is common. (FAO 1995:11)

Other nutritional disorders include a high incidence of goitre due to iodine deficiency, a condition which affects women's reproductive health. The remedy for this is iodized salt; the fact that this

relatively simple solution has not been effectively implemented relates to the poverty and inadequate transport infrastructure of the country. In mountainous Laos, a UNICEF survey estimated the incidence of severe cases of goitre to be 65 per cent.

In Vietnam, 50 per cent of children under 5 years are malnourished, of whom 15 per cent are severely malnourished. This statistic is particularly significant in view of the fact that Vietnam is now the world's third largest rice producer, which implies that the bulk of the rice produced is being exported to earn foreign exchange, rather than for internal consumption by the population. This is a clear indication that malnutrition in the rural population can persist when development is focused mainly on increasing the productivity of export crops, even when the export crop in question is a food crop. At the policy level, there seems to exist some confusion between national food security and household food security, the assumption being that the former would lead automatically to the latter. But this assumption is not inevitably true.

Another illustration is the crop diversification policy found in many Southeast Asian countries, whereby it is part of rural development policy to assign fruit trees and vegetables for cultivation in the high-altitude uplands, and staples for cultivation as plantation monocultures in the lowlands. Such a policy is generally motivated by a concern for crops cultivated for export, rather than for subsistence. But this reduces the smallholders' safety net of planting mixed crops that would include a range of food crops and commercial crops, thereby exposing to greater uncertainties, such as the fluctuations of the commodities market and the vagaries of weather and pests. Monocultures basically affect the diversity of food available, which, in turn, affects nutrition, morbidity and mortality, particularly among women and children. (See FAO 1995: 9-11).

In addition, water pollution and toxic waste dumping in the rural areas have brought about serious consequences for women. As pointed by Dehlot (1992:8):

women of childbearing age are more vulnerable to environmental pollutants than men because of their reproductive function and breastfeeding practice. Many reports have linked reproductive defects to contaminants such as lead. With the yearly increase in the number of chemicals, the impact on women and children appears to be on a rising scale. According to UN studies, the possible effects of exposure to chemicals range from infertility, miscarriage, malformation, neonatal death, to growth retardation.

It is thus quite clear that environmental degradation and the loss of livelihood resources is seriously affecting people's health and life-chances. The environmental health of many communities in the region has become problematic as a result of:

- ú Land degradation and the loss of topsoil
- ú Pesticide contamination of water and soils
- ú Depletion of marine fish stocks
- ú Urban air pollution
- ú Water pollution by industrial and residential wastes.

The paramount issue is that livelihood resources are being extracted to support industries and to

boost exports. However, the income from these extracted resources generally go to the people who own the industries and not the communities who depend on these resources for their livelihoods. Such processes have brought about the massive impoverishment of whole communities.

The evidence clearly indicates that not everyone is prospering within the Southeast Asian region, despite seemingly 'healthy' growth rates. Furthermore, sectors that are growing in Southeast Asia are also causing undesirable ripple effects in economies and on communities outside Southeast Asia. Indeed, it cannot be assumed that the rapid economic development found in some sectors is unquestioningly beneficial to all.

The NICs, the near NICs and the aspiring NICs To understand the existing disparities, we must understand the different development experiences within Southeast Asia and also in some of the implicated economies outside, from which wealth has been drawn into Southeast Asia. Three patterns of development in the Asian and Pacific region have emerged in the last decade, differentiated in terms of economic growth and social investment.

1. The high-growth economies among these are the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs), including Brunei, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, with Japan as the earliest industrialised economy in the Asian and Pacific region
2. The fluctuating economies (based largely on exports of resources) in particular, Malaysia, and Thailand. These may also be termed the 'near-NICs', as their rates of growth are approaching that of the NICs.
3. The low-growth economies aspiring to become NICs; these may be divided into:
  - ú Densely populated low-growth economies, such as Indonesia, Burma and the Philippines. South Asian economies also fall in to this category.
  - ú Transitional economies of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Although China is not in Southeast Asia, the shift of the Chinese economy towards free enterprise has a major impact on economies in Southeast Asia.
  - ú Sparsely populated low-growth economies of the Pacific Island states.

In the search for effective development options, the high-growth economies of Southeast and East Asia have become the new standard-setters of development, as the 'social equity model' of the command economies has collapsed. In the region's current economic situation, there is a 'follow-the-leader' chain of development experiences where all the other countries, including the low-growth and ex-socialist countries, are scrambling to emulate the high-growth economies, especially the NICs. A 'NIC model of development' has thus emerged as a development strategy to follow. This is currently being promoted by both governments and international financial agencies, notably the World Bank and the IMF.

Both these institutions have been encouraging the lower-growth countries especially debtor countries to pursue policies that will allow the inflow of foreign investments. Many of these

governments have thus put in place structural adjustment policies, including the deregulation of labour relations and the opening up of domestic markets and industries. These policies are meant to increase exports, encourage the entry of foreign investors to set up export processing zones (EPZs), as well as to channel financial resources away from social services.<sup>12</sup> This would enable the maximum use—indeed the exploitation—of natural and human resources, once the economy is open to foreign investors, and once adequate infrastructure has been installed to facilitate maximum resource exploitation. However, since such policies are not really derived from the examples of the NICs themselves—which have in fact highly protectionist, tightly planned economies—it is highly uncertain whether these policies will actually lead to the spawning of more NICs.

A question that should be asked is whether it is possible for all countries in Southeast Asia, as well as in the larger global economy, to attain the type of economic performance which Singapore as well as the other high growth countries in the Asian region have achieved. There is currently an implicit assumption that this is not only possible but that it is the only desirable goal. However, can all countries really attain the rate of growth that the NICs now enjoy? Is this assumption justifiable in the light of what happens in reality? What is the resource base of such growth? What are the consequences of such growth on women?

The 'NIC model of development' is in effect a recycled replica of the 'trickle down' strategy of the 1940s and 50s, with the same flaws and inadequacies as before. The questions one can ask about the 'trickle down' strategy are thus relevant to the 'NIC model':

- ú Can market growth, pure and simple, be the answer to poverty alleviation?
- ú What has been the result of the implementation of growth-oriented policies and the resulting market expansion?
- ú What has been its impact on the alleviation of poverty?
- ú Whose economies are benefiting from this type of development?

It is quite clear that growth-oriented development serves primarily the interests of powerful economic and political sectors of society. In this process, new patterns of impoverishment, gender inequity, and environmental degradation are created. There is generally no equitable 'trickling down' of wealth, because the very process of wealth creation itself is posited on obtaining as cheaply as possible both natural resources and human labour, especially women's labour.

If the 'trickle down' strategy was inadequate before, it is even more inadequate now. Its failure is due to a number of serious misconceptions, including the following:

The misconception	Wealth generated in a country will remain in the country.
The reality	We live in a world where currently, one trillion dollars change hands

everyday in the global  
financial market, and where  
national economies are  
destabilised by trans-  
national processes

The  
misconcept  
ion

There are limits to wealth  
accumulation and when the  
people on top have reached  
their limits, the surplus  
will 'trickle down'.

The  
reality

The United Nations  
Development Programme's  
Human Development Report  
1994 indicates that the gap  
in the income distribution  
is growing. The income of  
the richest 20 per cent has  
increased from 30 times  
greater than that of the  
poorest 20 per cent in  
1960, to 61 times greater  
in 1993. This statistic  
clearly indicates that  
there are no natural  
limitations to wealth  
accumulation.

The  
misconcept  
ion  
The  
reality

Poverty and wealth  
generation are separate and  
unrelated processes.  
Impoverishment and wealth  
accumulation are inter-  
linked. Poverty is not a  
static phenomenon but the  
result of an ongoing  
process of impoverishment  
related to the loss of  
livelihood resources.  
Wealth, on the other hand,  
is generated through  
obtaining resources as  
cheaply as possible,  
whether these be natural  
resources or human labour.

The  
misconcept  
ion

Once surplus is generated  
through economic growth,  
there are no social  
barriers to the 'trickling  
down' of wealth.

The reality	We live in stratified societies where inequities have been institutionalised. There are thus all kinds of barriers that maintain the stratification system, including gender, ethnicity, religion, class and caste. Wealth cannot automatically flow across these barriers, if these barriers are not done away with first. For example, in many countries, even if land were available, women's rights to land ownership need to be established as a prior issue before women can own any of the available land.
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Thus, the 'trickle down' strategy lacks gender- sensitivity. A major flaw of this development strategy is its overwhelming concern with the generation of wealth, without any attention given to how the gender hierarchy and other institutionalised barriers need to be addressed before wealth can be equitably re-distributed.

This growth-oriented model of development focuses only on rates of growth, completely ignoring the patterns of growth. Because of this overwhelming preoccupation with growth rates, it is assumed that development which benefits one sector of society will automatically benefit other sectors of society. There is thus little concern for the concentration of wealth in one narrow sector of society and the lack of channels of equitable distribution.

This unbalanced pattern of growth has brought about new patterns of wealth and poverty, with profound consequences for local communities, women and the poor. For example, it is assumed that what benefits men will automatically also benefit women. The fact that women within most societies have different roles than those of men and are therefore differently affected by economic or development policies is not often accounted for. 'Development' can thus generate very different consequences for women and men, for the poor and the rich, and for rural and urban populations.

To redress this inadequacy in development thinking, it is important to identify and analyse key aspects in the patterning of growth:

- ú The sectors of society in which development activities are concentrated, both nationally and regionally
- ú The sectors of society to which natural and human resources flow

ú The sectors of society from which natural and human resources flow.

An indication of where development activities in the region are concentrated would be:

ú The increase in the number of industrial towns

ú The increase in the amounts spent on infrastructure

ú The increase in the amounts spent on mega-development projects, such as dams built for higher energy outputs.

Not only should there be an evaluation of the environmental and social impact of such development activities, there should also be a comprehensive analysis of the resource base upon which such development is founded. This should include not just on-site resources, but also the 'ghost acreage' in terms of the resources extracted and transferred from distant ecological sites. (The term 'ghost acreage' is defined by Catton (1980: 276) as 'the additional farmland a given nation would need in order to supply that net portion of the food or fuel it uses but does not obtain from contemporary growth of organisms within its borders'.)

There should thus be a focused mapping and tracking of the flow of natural and human resources in terms of their source and destination. This can be done through the monitoring of:

ú The increasing import and export of natural resources, both as raw materials and as processed goods

ú The increasing migration of workers moving from the rural sector to the urban sector, and from lower-growth countries to higher-growth countries.

Existing evidence indicates that economic growth in Southeast Asia and in the wider Asia and Pacific region is urban-centred and that rural poverty has increased absolutely (see Fryer 1990: 168). The income gap has widened, especially between urban and rural sectors. And environmental resources of the rural sector are increasingly drawn upon to support the growing consumption of energy and other resources in the high-growth cities.

Such development processes occur not just within nation-states, but trans-nationally across different countries. The development experiences in the region are symbiotic and inter-connected, such that the pattern of development occurring in one area has implications for the pattern of development taking place in another area. The spectrum of development experiences in the region thus has to be understood as parts forming a whole, and not as unconnected incidents separate from a larger picture.

From this perspective, neither the high growth of certain countries nor the low growth of other countries can be simplistically accounted for by their supposed cultural tradition. Even though such reductionist explanations are often used. For example, the rapid growth of Singapore's economy, is often misattributed to such stereotypical constructs as 'Confucianism' or a tradition of entrepreneurship (such as Chinese business acumen). Conversely, the low economic growth of other countries is often misattributed to equally stereotypical constructs, such as the laissez-faire work attitudes of the people or an innate lack of entrepreneurial skills. It has, of course, been conveniently

forgotten that long before the high-growth countries attained their success, the very same cultural tradition being praised now, was blamed at that time for their lack of 'progress'.

Another kind of explanation often used to account for economic difference is the style of governance. Since the high growth countries in the region tend to have strong (at times, even authoritarian) governments, a tendentious argument has arisen that low growth is due to too much democracy and that authoritarianism is good for economic growth. But there is no necessary correlation between the style of governance and the level of economic growth. Both authoritarian and democratic styles of governance can be found in countries at different levels of economic growth. Not only that, any government in any country can flip between both styles of governance at different periods of time.

An accurate and comprehensive understanding of the Southeast Asian region must also take into account not easily visible phenomena, such as the trans-national alliances that criss-cross the contexts of state, market and geopolitics. In some patterns of development, the flow of resources towards a particular direction may foster certain styles of governance to facilitate this flow. In such a situation, political power colludes with economic interests outside the country. Power thus translates into money, and money translates into power with 'corruption' being a symptom of this flow. The link between colluding parties has arisen from at least two factors:

- ú The political control of resources still falls within the ambit of national governments
- ú In the less industrialised countries, where the technological capacity is not able to maximise monetary returns on natural resources, the exchange of these resources for money can occur only through export to more industrialised countries.

It is quite clear then that even the development experiences within one country have to be understood, not just in terms of internal factors, but in a larger context of inter-connected development patterns.

At this point, we can again pose the question: can all countries in Southeast Asia, or in the Asian and Pacific region become NICs? The answer is 'no'. Even if a few more countries were to become NICs and even if the countries themselves were to exchange economic places, the fact remains that there are definite ecological parameters to profit-driven growth based on resource extraction and commodification.

The transfer of resources into a growing stockpile of 'wealth' is indeed the ecological process underlying the 'miracle economies' of the NICs. Resources have been drawn from a far-flung ghost acreage to boost and sustain the rapid accumulation of wealth. The resources extracted and transferred are resources depleted from elsewhere. In concrete terms, this means the siphoning off of human and environmental resources from rural areas to urban centres, and from the lower-growth countries to the higher-growth countries. The alarming rate of environmental degradation as a result of the extractive mode of development is occurring across all ecological zones, including both highlands and lowlands, land and sea.



Given these parameters, it is clear that every NIC stands at the peak of a resource pyramid, drawing upon a hinterland that includes the rural sector within the country, as well as other, lower-growth, countries. This resource pyramid is analogous to the food chain. The number of large-sized omnivorous mammals at the top of the food chain is ecologically limited by the food resources processed upwards through this chain. (See Colinvau 1980a, 1980b). Similarly, the number of NICs at the top of the resource pyramid is limited by the hinterlands available. But as the 'NIC model' becomes the universal standard for all countries in the region, the competition for resources intensifies for those on top to stay up there and for those below to get up there as well. Correspondingly, this will intensify the process of resource extraction (for example, in the use of energy), thereby depleting resources even more drastically and polarising patterns of wealth and poverty even further. The net effect will be a reduced resource pyramid.

It is precisely because the interdependence of economies in Southeast Asia and in the Asian and Pacific region is not recognised that poverty and environmental degradation are treated as issues totally separate from the relentless emphasis on boosting economic growth rates. As a result of this misrecognition, contradictory policies have been adopted by governments and international agencies such as the World Bank and IMF. On the one hand, there is the promotion of sustainable development in the wake of the environmental crisis. On the other hand, high priority is given to rapid economic growth, without any cognisance of the harmful effects of unchecked resource extraction.

This contradiction can be resolved through a comprehensive analysis of the flow of resources, and the costs and benefits of development. Such an analysis needs to be calculated, not just in monetary terms (that is, dollars and cents), but in terms of environmental and human values (for example, biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods). Who benefits and who bears the costs of current patterns of development will then be clear. An equalisation of these costs and benefits would result from an equalisation of resource use and allocation. That should be the aim of a strategy for more sustainable and more equitable development that will be responsive to the needs of local communities, women and the poor.

The making and maintenance of the high-growth economies Beginning in the 1960s, many Southeast Asian governments have adopted economic growth through comprehensive industrialisation as the goal of development. Industrialisation has occurred hand-in-hand with urbanisation. The urban centres that have developed are not cyclical eco-systems that can be self-sustaining. All cities today are dependent on water, energy, food and even human resources that are transported from rural hinterlands. The maintenance of urban settlements require:

- ú Cheap energy sources to support both industrial and household consumption
- ú Extensive water, sanitation and waste disposal facilities
- ú Price control of food and other basic necessities in order to keep prices low enough for the urban labour force.

The needs of urban settlements generate considerable ecological damage and social imbalance. For example, mega-development projects such as dams that flood vast areas of land, destroy fauna and flora and displace rural dwellers are built largely to meet the energy needs of urban, industrial

consumers (see Hirsch 1987).

High-growth, urban-centred economies, such as Singapore, have densely built-up cities where the small rural sectors have diminished into non-existence. Industrial manufacturing, export trade, and commercial services constitute the economic mainstay of Singapore. Its mode of development is not applicable to most other countries with significant agricultural sectors.

These processes of rural-urban imbalance are now experienced by other countries in the region that are trying to model themselves after the NICs. The pursuit of an industrial and export-oriented 'NIC model of development' has led these countries to embrace policies that transform the rural sector in very fundamental ways through:

- ú The large transfer of land and other resources from agriculture to the commercial and industrial sector
- ú The supplanting of food crops by cash crops
- ú The replacement of numerous, small-scale farms by few, large-scale plantations
- ú The reduction of mixed farming based on crop variety to monocultures
- ú The replacement of farm workers by agricultural machines, thereby leading to rural unemployment and underemployment.

Many countries in the region pursuing such policies have witnessed the reduction and depletion of the livelihood base of the rural population. This has particularly affected women and children, smallholders and the landless. Those who were previously able to provide for their own livelihoods are now dependent on urban migration. In turn, rural migrants become the 'new urban poor', congregating in squatter communities. Should these rural people continue to stay in the rural sector as wage workers—for example, as plantation workers—their livelihoods become vulnerable to the fluctuating prices of commodities and labour.

Shifting production from high-growth, high-cost economies to low-growth, low-cost economies

In addition to the import of lower-waged migrant labour, the high-growth economies can lower production costs by shifting their production sites to other lower growth countries. This process of production transfer is now very prevalent in the region, with the high growth economies extending their economic boundaries, often with the full support and encouragement of their governments. After the initial phase of development as the suppliers of cheap labour to trans-national corporations (TNCs), the high-growth countries are now themselves producing TNCs which are looking for sources of cheap labour overseas.

The economic advantage of moving production to a lower-growth economy is not just lower-waged labour, but also lower-priced land, water and other resources. From the perspective of the high-growth economies, there are four possibilities for production transfer:

- ú Into the rural sector within the country itself

- ú Into lower-growth countries in the immediate vicinity
- ú Into transitional economies moving from command economies to a globalised market economy
- ú Into other low-growth countries in the region.

Economic growth is thus ecologically expansionist. It uses up the resources of one ecological zone and then moves on to tap the resources of other ecological zones. Such rapidly growing economies are often described as 'dynamic'. This so-called 'dynamism' moves into the ecological zones of more static economies. To protect themselves from the economic penetration of the higher- growth economies, the lower-growth economies usually embark upon their own strategy for rapid economic growth, so as to utilise their own resources, rather than let them be used by others. Growth thus generates counter- growth in international economic relations.

Unlike workers, jobs do not travel by themselves. When production transfer occurs, an entire infrastructure has to be relocated. This generally involves:

- ú The investment capital of foreign investors
- ú Infrastructural loans from the international financial institutions
- ú A conducive policy climate by governments
- ú The cheapest labour available in the country\_usually women's underpaid labour.

This process of production transfer has the blessings of the IMF and the World Bank. It boosts exports from the lower-growth economies, thereby supposedly increasing their earnings. However, what is not sufficiently monitored and checked is the amount of profits taken out of the country. Factories owned by companies from Singapore and the other high growth economies in the Asian region such as Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan are a common sight in lower growth countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and now Vietnam and Cambodia.

This is taking place in tandem with the opening up of the giant economies of China and India. Indeed, it is impossible to separate development and economic policies in Southeast Asia from those of other Asian and Pacific economies, due to the close interdependence of economies in the region. For example, there have been massive investments in Southeast Asia from Japan and the other Newly Industrialised Economies. In fact, direct Japanese investments in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, as well as in China, have increased nearly 10 times from US\$0.7 billion in 1985 to US\$6.6 billion in 1994.<sup>13</sup> Taiwan and Hong Kong are the largest investors in Vietnam while South Korea and Taiwan are the leading investors in Myanmar. Taiwan also invests considerably in the Philippines, while South Korea invests significantly in Indonesia. The economies of Indonesia and Malaysia have also grown from the opening up of markets in the Pacific.

Within ASEAN, trade between countries is also increasing, generating significant outward investment flows, mostly to their less developed regional neighbours. Singapore is one of the top foreign investors in Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. In fact, Singapore is Vietnam's largest trade partner, accounting for 30 per cent of that country's total trade. It also

invests heavily in the Philippines and India. Malaysia and Thailand are also increasing their investments in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.<sup>14</sup> China has attracted the most foreign investment from the ASEAN countries.

To enable the establishment of the new factories, industrial estates or export processing zones (EPZs), land zoning policies have to be implemented in the lower growth economies. Many governments in the lower growth countries, eager to increase domestic earnings, often offer a host of incentives to attract the TNCs. For example, foreign investors may be granted 'tax holidays' and exemption from trade and labour laws. Such governments often even legislate against the right of workers to organise unions within the EPZs. This has a particular impact on women workers, since they usually constitute the majority of workers in the EPZs (see Agarwal 1988: 7-11).

The use of women's non-unionised labour in EPZs has become a most common method for low-growth economies to jump-start the economy. The growth of the NICs had first been fuelled by women's low-cost labour in their own countries. With an educated workforce in the recent years, they have themselves branched into the technological and service industries. What is important, however, is that their reliance on women's cheap labour continues, perhaps not from their own female citizens, but from the labour of other women in other countries.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the story of the high-growth economies is also the story of the lower-growth economies. The high-growth economies did not develop in isolation, but in complement with the lower-growth economies. This pattern of implicational development—that is, development within one economy that implicates other economies—has now spread to almost every country in the region. Furthermore, implicational development implicates not just other economies, but also future generations. This pattern of development is clearly unsustainable because it passes the costs to others, especially those who are the most vulnerable members of society.

'Development' that focuses on intensive industrialisation for monetary returns, neglects issues of environmental and social viability. This has already led to direct, as well as indirect, costs borne by communities and individuals. It becomes particularly dangerous when such developmental change takes place rapidly and the impact is 'hidden', as it is borne 'privately' by individuals, families and communities. These environmental and social costs do not emerge as a cost item in the foreign investors' development projects.

These environmental and social costs include:

- ú The degradation of the environment and the loss of livelihood resources for local communities
- ú Massive population displacement as communities are moved out of areas designated for industrial estates, housing estates, golf courses, hotels and resorts, reservoirs and roads
- ú The influx of migrant workers from other parts of the country as well as from other countries, thereby increasing population density and pressures on resource use.

These environmental and social costs are also economic costs, that will eventually have a bearing on the monetary returns of investments. This linkage can be understood by considering that what first attracted high- growth economies to invest in lower-growth economies was the relatively cheap natural and human resources. But why are these resources cheap? The reason extends beyond just rates of foreign exchange. There are deeper underlying causes for the lower costs, which would also explain why these resources do not stay cheap when foreign capital penetrates the local economy.

First of all, when natural resources (such as land) are in abundant supply relative to need and demand, they are cheap. However, when rural areas are industrialised, the use and consumption of these resources is intensified, through the industrial process itself and through increasing population density as a result of labour migration. Scarcity drives prices up. This changing relationship between supply and demand also applies to labour. When labour is plentiful in relation to jobs available, wages are low. But if investments reach a saturation point and companies start having to compete for workers, wages go up.

There is another important reason for low wages, which is usually overlooked. In many low-growth economies, community livelihoods in the rural sector are based on a direct, non-monetised use of resources. Thus, villagers do not need money to buy their everyday livelihood resources\_ water from rivers and wells, fish from rivers and the sea, animals that they trap, hunt or breed, food crops that they plant, or land that they inherit from their ancestors. In such a context, their need for money arises only when they need a luxury good produced in the industrialised world\_ for example, a portable radio. Consequently, waged employment is undertaken on a discretionary basis, as and when personal need arises. Consequently, low wages are tolerated because money is not crucially needed for livelihood needs. However, when everyday livelihood resources are lost, especially when communities are dislocated from their habitat, then money becomes an urgent priority. The low wages that villagers were previously willing to put up with can no longer sustain their everyday survival, if they have to pay for land, water, food, and even garbage disposal. The loss of the everyday livelihood resources of rural communities thus has a direct impact on rising labour costs.

Furthermore, even rising wages may not be able to compete with the rising prices of essential resources, the most important of which is land. The result is the familiar phenomenon of squatters who lay claim to land through occupation. If this phenomenon increases beyond a point of tolerance by foreign investors, they are likely to transfer their operations elsewhere.

This situation can create a boom-and-bust, rise-and- fall pattern in the transfer of production from high- growth to low-growth economies. After a while, the rising costs of production, the increasing scarcity of natural resources and the increasing numbers of the visible poor may drive investments away to look for other fresh sites. The end result may be the emergence of 'ghost towns' out of previous industrial sites.

Production transfer to the rural sector within the country is sometimes described as 'decentralised industrialisation' and is promoted as being beneficial to the rural population because it provides jobs. Two key aspects are, however, overlooked in such a presentation:

- ú Usually the local communities affected are not asked whether they would like to have factories sited in their area. As a result, these communities become the mute

recipients of foreign-adapted methods of production that mostly involve low-skill mass manufacturing of peripheral parts. There is thus no real transfer of skills that can be steadily upgraded. Instead, the rural employees of the factory become dependent on an external employer who can shift base and withdraw altogether. In the meantime, the rural penetration of factory work impacts on existing livelihoods, eroding centuries of survival skills and knowledge.

- ú Such production transfer has an environmental impact that may adversely affect human health. For example, the discharge of toxic waste may contaminate rivers and groundwater. The pollution of the environment would eventually destroy the community's livelihood resources and would exacerbate\_or even create\_rural poverty.

Ironically, therefore, rather than improving community livelihoods in the rural sector, 'decentralised industrialisation' can have adverse effects on the rural population.

In recent years, production transfer has tended to occur in the context of a sub-regional grouping called the 'Growth Triangle'.<sup>15</sup> This is a microcosm of economic interdependence that explicitly links different economies. The first such 'triangle' was the SIJORI Triangle, comprising Singapore, Johor in Malaysia, and the Riau Islands in Indonesia. This 'Growth Triangle' has the full support of the governments involved and has been hailed as a major step in sub-regional co-operation that can be used as a model for further strengthening economic co-operation in ASEAN (see Kumar & Lee 1991: 3).

Other new 'Growth Triangles' have subsequently been declared, including:

- ú A 'triangle' encompassing North Sumatra (Indonesia), Penang (Malaysia) and South Thailand
- ú A 'triangle' encompassing Mindanao (Philippines), Sabah (Malaysia) and Brunei.

The 'Growth Triangle' derives from the concept of linking three neighbouring areas with different endowments and different comparative economic advantages to form a larger sub-region with greater potential for economic growth. According to this model of growth, the differences in comparative advantage would serve to complement one another rather than compete with each other. Industries located within the 'Growth Triangle' can take advantage of the efficient infrastructure and higher skilled workers of one location and the lower costs and ample supply of cheaper labour, land and other resources in other locations. A trans-national symbiotic relationship is thus established between the countries based on the fact that the respective countries are at different stages of growth\_for example, Singapore with a high growth rate, Malaysia with a medium growth rate, and Indonesia with a lower growth rate.

Case study 5  
Environmental and social costs in the Growth Triangle

It is significant that the concept of the 'Growth Triangle' originated from Singapore, which has a highly industrialised economy located in a densely built-up city-state, where the rural sector has dwindled to insignificance. Like all other cities, it is dependent on water, energy, food and even human labour drawn from rural hinterlands.

Apart from its own reservoirs, Singapore currently buys unprocessed water from Johor in Malaysia. This is filtered and chlorinated for consumption in Singapore, with any remaining excess sold back to Johor as processed water. In recent years, this water trade has become a political controversy in Malaysia, especially when Melaka was suffering from a drought and Johor was not able to help, because of its existing commitment to sell water to Singapore. The issue of Johor buying back as processed water at least some of the water it sells to Singapore has further deepened this controversy. Singapore is already unable to provide for its own water needs in its current state of development. In view of increasing water needs as a result of projected population growth and further industrialisation, alternative supplies of water are definitely needed, especially if Johor's supply cannot be vouchsafed.

Indonesian Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, said Singapore's intention to buy water from Indonesia would not cause 'unhealthy competition' with Malaysia, which has for a long time been Singapore's main source of water. [This] was first made public by Mr Lee [Kuan Yew] when he visited Jakarta in October [1989]. The Republic's water needs were expected to escalate and Johor, now a main supplier, had not agreed to build more dams for the time being. A feasibility study would have to be conducted before a decision could be made on the supply of Indonesian water to Singapore. If adopted, the proposal would involve bringing water from Jambi or Riau in Sumatra to Batam before going to Singapore. (Straits Times 24 November 1989)

It is thus significant that in an Agreement-in-principle signed on 28 August 1990, the Singapore and Indonesian governments agreed on the joint development of tourism, water supply, and industries in the Riau islands. This explicitly states, inter alia, that:

Singapore and Indonesia will co-operate in the sourcing, supply and distribution of water to Singapore. The terms of co-operation will be set out in a separate agreement.

(Straits Times 29 August 1990: 1).

At present, as far as is currently known, on Bintan island alone, three freshwater reservoirs are to be built:

- ú one specifically for the stretch of beach resorts on the north coast of Bintan
- ú one in the middle of Bintan island
- ú one to be constructed as a dam in Teluk Bintan (the Bay of Bintan) from which the sea water is to be pumped out and into which several rivers are to pour their freshwater.

This amount of freshwater to be collected exceeds the needs of the 90,000-strong population of Bintan. Much of it will therefore be channelled to meet the needs of other populations. As mentioned by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, it will probably be pumped via Batam to Singapore. (See also

Straits Times 10 April 1990).

The allocation of land and resources in Bintan is thus being determined not by local needs but by external agendas. The thousands of people living in the affected areas are all to be resettled. Some have already been resettled, while others are still waiting to be informed of their fate. The livelihoods and lives of local communities are thus being disrupted by the development needs of another economy in another country.

Even so, according to the Singapore Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Finance, the one million gallons of water a day available from Bintan would not be sufficient for both domestic needs and Singapore's needs. Therefore, another site in mainland Riau, located opposite Pulau Burung, has been identified as a more abundant source of water.

Mr [Tunky] Ariwibowo [the Indonesian Junior Industry Minister] said the Indonesian government wanted its private sector to be actively involved in the proposed project to pipe water to Singapore, and the leading conglomerate, the Salim Group has come forward\_. A spokesman for the Salim Group said its 500,000 ha of land on the Riau mainland could harness about five million tonnes (about one billion gallons) of water daily. (Straits Times 10 April 1990).

There is thus a collusion of interests between the Singapore government, the Indonesian government and private-sector conglomerates, particularly the Salim group which is playing a leading role in the both mainland and island Riau. Where do the interests of local communities fit into this tran-national scenario for development? Do the people living in the affected areas even know what is being planned for their land, their homes and their resources? Is the Salim Group's 500,000 ha of land on the Riau mainland totally uninhabited? What will be the environmental impact of these huge dams built in Riau? And who will be most affected by this impact, which will include the loss of bio-diversity and the loss of land?

Obviously, drastic changes to the habitat will most affect the people living in that habitat, rather than those who will be enjoying the benefits of such changes in faraway Singapore, Jakarta and beyond. Yet the people most affected are those with the least say in the matter. A big gap has thus arisen between:

ú Those who decide on the use and allocation of land  
and other resources

ú Those who depend on the land and natural resources  
for their everyday livelihoods

In the Growth Triangle, a particular pattern may be discerned in the trans-national flow of capital, technology, natural resources and people. Capital and technology are flowing in as investments from the higher-growth economy to the lower-growth economies\_for example, from Singapore to Riau. A significant proportion of these investments is expended on the leasing of land (for an initial period of 30 years, in most cases). Although it is a legal requirement that these investments be made through bi-national joint ventures, the result is that the development of huge areas of the Riau Islands is determined according to external needs and planning that generally does not take into account the needs and choices of the local communities.



Apart from the building of dams for water, other functions have thus been allocated to the different islands of Riau. At least three types of functions are discernible:

- ú     Infrastructural development
- ú     The development of leisure industries, especially beach resorts and golf courses
- ú     The development of the manufacturing industries, especially through setting up industrial estates.

For example, the island of Batam, which is about the size of Singapore, has been designated primarily as an industrial zone, with a scattering of hotels and golf courses for tourists. All the land in Batam has been acquired by the Batam Industrial Authority. Bintan island in Riau\_which is about two and a half times the size of Singapore\_has to been demarcated into specific zones:

- ú     The entire span of the north coast is allocated for the development of golf courses and beach resorts
- ú     The southwestern coast is to be dedicated to light industry
- ú     Three freshwater reservoirs are to be built

This pattern of land and resource allocation is leading to the massive dislocation of families and communities. Many have had their land 'acquired' by local governments for public or private development. There has been no recognition of the land rights of local communities who have been living on the islands for centuries, but who do not have title deeds. Consequently, only minimal compensation has been given to the people who were treated as squatters and compensated only for their house structures and fruit trees. The compensation has been about Rp50 (about US\$0.025) for each square metre of the footprint of a village house. In many cases, the monetary compensations (usually given to the men only) have subsequently been spent on relocation. Of these, a significant number have become landless due to insufficient compensation or knowledge relating to capital investment. Destitution has led to the break-up of families and communities, with both or either spouse, and the young and able, heading for towns and cities in search of permanent employment.

Just as the local communities have been misrecognised as squatters, resettlement is also misconceptualised simply as a rehousing issue. No attention is given to the resource base and traditional livelihoods of the communities involved. There are thus cases of fishing communities being moved far inland without any regard for the loss of their access to the sea and the loss of their livelihoods. No compensation is given for the loss of their boats as means of livelihood. Indeed, it was explicitly stated by a high-ranking policy-maker in an interview that the aim is to transform all fishing and farming communities into an industrial workforce. But will taking away the livelihood resource base of a fishing or farming community automatically transform them into industrial workers? An example we can learn from is the resettlement of the people who lived on the north coast of Bintan island, Riau, to make way for the development of golf courses and hotel resorts spanning the entire coastline. Since resettlement, this community has lost its traditional means of livelihood based on fishing and plantation cultivation. They now live in dire poverty and are struggling to survive. While a few members of the community have been able to move to nearby towns to find odd jobs, the rest of the community are unable to do so, as they would be even less able to afford the high costs of living in town. It should be realised that employment opportunities generated by industrialisation are most suited for able-bodied young men. Indeed, many factories

want to hire only workers in their twenties; even those in their thirties are regarded as 'over-aged'. Village communities, however, are inter-generational collectivities of people who have evolved a livelihood system based on mutual support. Each village has women and men, young and old, the able-bodied and the not-so-able, who together forge a community livelihood derived from a shared resource base. An employment policy that caters only to able-bodied young men neglects the livelihoods of whole communities.

As a result of the age and gender skewering of industrial labour demand, a paradoxical situation has arisen whereby there is a labour shortage of able-bodied young men, coupled with the unemployment, and underemployment of everyone else. In the case of the Riau islands, this selective labour shortage is filled by young, male and able-bodied migrants from other Indonesian islands, especially Java, Bali and Sumatra. This makes the existing local communities economically dependent on the financial contributions of their younger members. Should these contributions not be forthcoming for any reason—such as low wages, personal expenditure, illness, loss of a job, loss of money, and so on—the other members of the community could face serious livelihood difficulties.

In a situation where hundreds of thousands of people are going to be displaced by development projects, it is important to understand that the village is not an urban residential block of strangers who happen to live together. The village community shares a mode of production, consumption and distribution. Therefore, resettlement is more than just re-housing. Usually, where housing is provided for resettled communities, the cheapest, most functional form of housing (such as zinc-roofed wooden huts) is provided, with no consideration for the reconstitution of sustainable livelihoods for resettled communities. Resettlement must thus involve the establishment of an alternative livelihood base for the community as a whole, and not just gender-specific employment opportunities for able-bodied young men.

Another gendered impact is the growth of the sex industry. A number of factors have contributed to this:

- ú The concentration of large number of male migrant workers from all over Indonesia
- ú The rise of sex tourism
- ú The impoverishment of girls and women who have few economic alternatives.

As a result, there are now in the Riau archipelago, such new phenomena as 'sex islands' and 'sex towns', where the sex industry is the only industry of an entire island (for example, Pulau Babi) or an entire 'town' (for example, sites on Bintan and Batam, each comprising some 2000 prostitutes and equipped with headman, mosque, clinic, etc.) (See Wee 1985, 1988 and 1995.)

Economies with fluctuating growth or the 'Near NICs' The 'near NICs' are medium-growth economies based primarily on the export of natural resources and commodities. The countries in the region with this type of economy include Malaysia and Thailand. These are described as 'fluctuating economies' for two reasons. First of all, these economies fluctuate because of the fluctuating prices of commodities in the world market. For example, the 1980s saw a fall in commodity prices, which in turn slowed down the growth of these economies. There are thus market pressures for the diversification of the economy to industry and services, as well as the restructuring of the

agricultural sector. Therefore, the second reason for the fluctuations is that these economies have been undergoing restructuring to move the economy from a commodity base to an industrial, manufacturing and service sector base. This restructuring process generates changing employment structures, with corresponding gender implications.

Thailand is a good example of the type of development that economies with fluctuating growth have undergone, in trying to diversify and accelerate growth. The First National Economic Plan in Thailand was made in 1961. It was based on the 'unbalanced growth strategy', which prioritised development in those sectors with a high growth potential, with expectations of a spillover effect into other sectors. This strategy was adopted by the Thai government upon the strong influence of the World Bank. Important attention was thus given to the manufacturing and service sectors while the agricultural sector was neglected. This bias toward the manufacturing sector was a feature of both the import substitution thrust of the 1960s, as well as the export promotion thrust of the 1970s.

This imbalance has continued in Thailand, with 1994 figures indicating that the rural sector sees only 3 to 4 per cent growth, while the industrial sector has 10 to 12 per cent growth (see Engender 1995: 76). The central plains of Thailand particularly Bangkok have become the growth centre, while the north and north-eastern regions have become steadily impoverished. Massive rural-urban labour migration has occurred, swelling the ranks of the urban poor in Bangkok. Many of these migrants end up going further afield as transient contract workers in the high-growth economies.

The flow of rural-urban migrants is a gendered phenomenon. In some parts of north-east Thailand, where over-logging has led to the loss of livelihood resources, some villages now have only women, children and old people, because all the men have migrated in search of jobs. In such conditions of destitution, the rural poverty and indebtedness of many households have led to the bonding or selling of children especially young girls as debt payment. Many of these girls are sold into domestic service or into the sex industry (see Thorbek 1987).

Apart from the selling of young girls, many young women are pressured by the crisis of household survival and thus migrate to urban areas to earn money to support their families. The female out-migration from these areas outstrips the expansion of labour demand in the manufacturing and service sectors. Again, young women end up in the informal sector in domestic service, the 'entertainment industry' and the sex industry. It has been estimated that 10 per cent of women aged 14 to 24 in Bangkok are working in the sex industry (see Women in a changing global economy 1995: 67 and Sitthiraksa 1992: 93-108). Even those who find jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors may have to work in appalling conditions in factories and EPZs.

Parallel to the human flow is the flow of natural resources from the rural sector to the urban sector. Energy generated through the construction of dams is one resource that goes to meet the ever increasing demand for electricity in the cities. It has been observed that over half the electricity produced is being soaked up by Bangkok, with its large luxury hotels and burgeoning industrial base.

The use of resources in the rural sector has also been allocated according to urban needs and demands. For example, water is being diverted from rice farming to meet the needs of factories in Bangkok. Coastal areas have also been taken over for large-scale shrimp farming for export purposes. This has resulted in the destruction of mangroves, fish stock, and the degradation of soil

composition. The outcome is that as livelihoods based on farming and fishing fail due to resource scarcity, more and more rural people will be driven into urban slums.

The leisure activities of urbanites also have an impact on rural livelihoods. For example, the increasing number of golf courses has damaged surrounding farm areas through the use of harmful chemicals. Indeed, in Thailand, 200 golf courses have depleted the country's limited water supply that is vital for rice farmers. The situation is not very different in Malaysia where over 160 golf courses have swallowed up tracts of rainforest, and in Indonesia where 91 golf courses have replaced traditional farming wetlands and nature reserves. In one case, nearly 1,000 families were expelled to make way for these golf courses (see *The New Internationalist* January 1995: 16).

Rural resources have also been depleted through timber logging which has resulted in serious deforestation. In Thailand, forest cover has dropped from 50 per cent to 20 per cent in just 30 years.

#### Case study 6

##### Timber logging in Sarawak

Substantial profits are generated through logging. For example, the different states of Malaysia receive all logging royalties: these are the single largest source of revenue for the state governments. To take Sarawak in Malaysia as a case in point, in 1985 the total export of timber and timber products for this state alone was valued at 1.5 billion Malaysian dollars, and revenues equalled nearly 18 per cent of Sarawak's total. By 1991, the combined value of timber and its products had risen to 3.5 billion Malaysian dollars. Control of timber and land therefore lies at the heart of Sarawak's political economy.

Political success in Sarawak is a function of the accumulation and partial redistribution of economic resources as rewards to clients. The rewards come from control of the logging industry. The political leaders of the state dispense licences to their clients free of charge. The clients lease these licences to logging companies to set up the operation, and also to sub-contract many activities (felling, transport, hauling, rafting, etc.) to others. The holders of the licences have no interest in profitable and sustainable investment: they are rent-seekers, not entrepreneurs. Nor do sub-contractors have an interest in sustainable development, they want to get the job done as quickly as possible. Sarawak has excellent and semi-sustainable forestry legislation, but unfortunately this is not enforced.

In 1987 it was disclosed that the state government was in control of 3 million hectares of logging concessions. It became clear that the practice of dealing out logging licences to members of the state legislature had been commonplace over many years, and had created a class of instant millionaires; nearly every assemblyman over the years was one. The pace of logging increased dramatically in the 1980s. Sarawak's unprocessed log exports have risen to 15.8 cubic metres in 1991 from 6.7 cubic metres in 1980.<sup>16</sup> This has been accompanied by much fiercer enforcement of government claims to land to the exclusion of local farmers. The destruction of the forest has resulted in the loss of forest products, wildlife habitat, soil erosion, water quality degradation and consequent negative impact on the traditional livelihoods-based natural resources for food, fibre and shelter. The increase in logging activities in Sarawak partly compensates the slowing down of logging in Peninsular Malaysia, which has adopted a National Forestry Policy to reduce the annual cutting rate of timber because of its own over-rapid deforestation. The plan has been put into

effective implementation.

In the logging areas of Sarawak, the loss of livelihood resources for the local communities has brought about large-scale male out-migration in search of wage work and other market-based activities. This has become permanent in many cases and is no longer tied to the agricultural cycle, as it used to be. Women's livelihoods, on the other hand, still tend to be based on subsistence farming using an increasingly depleted resource base and on gathering increasingly scarce jungle products. With the shortage of male labour, women are forced into farming methods that use and re-use a smaller plot of land, thereby allowing a shorter fallow period. This situation threatens the economic and political role of women as they have no special relation to new crops, little access to new information and technology, and almost no access to the new land titles that are being issued (see Heyzer 1992 and Heyzer forthcoming).

As such processes continue, the rural sector becomes increasingly depleted, in terms of livelihood resources for local communities, as well as production resources for the urban industrial sector. Consequently, as their own rural sectors become depleted, these countries in the middle of the development hierarchy, have become both exporters and importers of resources. Thus, as forest resources have become scarce in Peninsular Malaysia, the extraction of timber has increased in Sarawak, a peripheral area in the Malaysian nation-state (see Ooi 1993: 89). Malaysian timber logging companies have also moved further afield to Papua New Guinea. The consequences on communities in Papua New Guinea have been devastating (see, for example, Cox 1994). Similarly, as Thailand becomes deforested, Thai logging companies have moved significantly into Laos and Cambodia.

Lower-growth economies aspiring to be high-growth economies. The low-growth economies of Southeast Asia may be divided into two different categories:

- ú Densely populated low-growth economies of Indonesia,  
Burma and the Philippines
- ú Transitional economies of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

Densely populated lower-growth economies Rural impoverishment is widely experienced in the lower-growth countries. While these countries are still largely agricultural, there has been an increasingly strong emphasis on switching food crops to cash crops for export. This changes land-use patterns, as well as the entire livelihood base of local communities. The environmental and social consequences have been alarming.

#### Case study 7

##### Shifting from food crops to cash crops in Indonesia

A study of an upland region on the peripheries of Sulawesi, Indonesia, offers some special insight into questions of culture and power in the context of economic transformation\_in this case, the introduction into a swidden farm system of commercial tree crops for world markets\_About 20,000 Lauje are swidden farmers living in the mountains\_[and\_] have produced tobacco for sale in local markets since at least the 1920s, and shallots and garlic since the 1950s. These crops have been integrated into the swidden cycle along with staple foods, and do not disturb the unity of labour and

means of production. All farmers have had access to land, and neither land tenure arrangements nor the organisation of labour act as mechanisms for the appropriation of surplus between classes. Even within nuclear family households, the assumption that every woman, man and child is entitled to the product of their own labour is carried through to a remarkable extent. Married women often have their own food and cash crop gardens; children of both sexes are encouraged to farm independently at a very young age, keeping any 'surplus' to themselves; and old people farm to support themselves until physically incapable of doing so\_

The unity of labour and land in the middle hills is now being broken by the introduction of commercial tree crops such as cocoa, cloves and cashew, which privatise and effectively enclose land previously accessible to a wider group for food and short-term cash crop production. The shift in land use opens a new possibility for some to enhance their land rights while others become dispossessed. High population densities (40-80 per square kilometre) and the sparsity of hillside land for further expansion increase the possibility that some form of differentiation will occur. Moreover, the incentive for individuals to accumulate is present in the form of re-oriented consumer tastes, increasingly driven by lowland and urban standards\_

Today, the fact that commercial tree planting excludes other land users, who previously could make claims on fallow land for subsistence purposes, is recognised as a pragmatic fact. Already, in some areas of the hills it has become difficult to borrow land for short term food and cash crop production, and inequities in the initial distribution of land and trees are compounded through the 'simple reproduction squeeze' (Bernstein 1977). Some households with only small areas of land, unable to wait for young trees to yield and without additional plots to use for food production, have found themselves forced to sell land and move on. A few make up production shortfalls on inadequate land by wage labouring for their neighbours. In the meantime, sporadic disputes arise, some tree seedlings are burnt or uprooted, cocoa pods are stolen, and the act blamed on kin or neighbours jealous of success but too lazy to work\_

Although women and men have equal access to land for their swidden farming activities, the cultural capital and social power of men vis-à-vis women has increased with the introduction of commercial tree crops. Using arguments based on the relative value of the different types of labour invested, some men claim that women cannot become sole owners of cocoa or other trees, since they are not capable of transplanting the heavy seedlings, nor hoeing the hard earth. Women 'don't know how to work', work now redefined as heavy, men's work. Women 'only weed the grass', apparently an insignificant contribution (although one for which women are paid as labourers on other people's farms). Women are also said to lack knowledge about tree crops, a view strongly reinforced by local officials and agricultural extensionists, who direct their attention entirely towards men as farmers and as owners of trees, disregarding women's labour and the ownership rights that derive from it under the conjugal contract. In the context of these insecurities, a few women have engaged in direct, independent action to plant trees and lay individual claim to them. They acquire land by various means, including purchase (using their profits from shallots) and pay for commoditised male labour to undertake the heavy work, avoiding any 'assistance' from the husband which could result in future claims on the property. (Li forthcoming)

Community livelihoods are also threatened by mega-development projects that disturb the habitat in a comprehensive way, resulting in the loss of topsoil, desertification, the pollution and salination of groundwater, and the re-direction of riverine courses. These densely populated low-growth economies are characterised by gaping disparities of wealth and health. While the overwhelming

majority are struggling to stay alive, a small minority are enjoying immense wealth in enclaves of over-consumption. This is again symptomatic of a fundamentally inequitable pattern of economic development, where wealth is created by means of an exponentially expanding circumference of resources. Thus, as more and more resources are drawn upon to build up the wealth of the few, less and less of a livelihood base is left for the many who are poor.

Poverty is not merely a state of having no financial resources or income. Poverty needs to be understood more holistically as the deprivation of life-chances and human rights. The feminisation of poverty must also be understood in terms of women's health, empowerment and rights. Often, women living in utter poverty have no access to basic economic and social rights\_including rights to food, shelter, adequate clothing and gainful employment.

To address the crisis of poverty in these low-growth countries, economic restructuring is needed. However, many of these economies are ridden with debts that have multiplied many times above their original value. This has occurred largely because of currency fluctuations. The effect, however, is that the lower growth economies are made highly dependent on the fluctuations of the higher growth economies.

Another country that has a debilitating debt crisis is the Philippines. Ironically, the Philippines had the highest growth rate in the 1960s and was second to Japan then. But most of the economic gains of the 1960s were lost through corruption and bad management at the highest level. This economic decline was then compounded by the debt crisis. More than any other country in this region, the Philippines came under the sway of the Bretton Woods organisations. Structural adjustment policies became a prerequisite for obtaining development loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in response to low growth rates and balance of payment difficulties. These SAPs have impacted very critically on people's livelihoods through the casualisation of labour, and the de-skilling and displacement of an already relatively educated workforce. The result is economic shrinkage, leading to massive unemployment and underemployment. In particular, many professional and managerial jobs in the public sector employing women are adversely afflicted through wage freezes, cuts and redundancies\_including teachers, nurses, and clerical workers. A very substantial proportion of these women migrate as domestic workers to the higher-growth countries. There is thus a de-skilling process at both individual and national levels. All over the world, there are currently an estimated 1.2 million migrant workers from the Philippines, both male and female. Most of them are in transient overseas employment based on temporary work permits, with small likelihood of having jobs waiting for them at home.

### Transitional economies

The command economies were countries that had taken a different path of development from the growth model and had used a different way of developing their productive systems. They had favoured state-led development, where it was the socialist state, not the market, that allocated resources. During the heyday of the 'command system', there was a significant investment in social development in these countries, despite their low growth compared to many other countries.

However, economic inadequacies became manifestly evident in these command economies. Pressures and problems steadily built up. While a certain degree of development could be achieved, systemic irregularities\_such as the quota system, black market trading, corruption and

nepotism\_were produced by the technological gap, the bureaucratic structures of the state, and the whole system of incentives and disincentives. It became an economic necessity for these command economies, which were still predominantly rural economies, to shift towards becoming market economies. The command economies thus became the transitional economies.

A number of patterns are discernible in this process of economic transition. The resources of these countries which hitherto were inaccessible territories in Southeast Asia, have suddenly become accessible to foreign investors. There has been an increasing inflow of investors from the high-growth economies into Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The environmental and social consequences have been very similar to earlier development experiences of production transfer in the other low-growth countries of the region, such as the Philippines.

For example, economic growth in Vietnam has been uneven, being concentrated in the cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. Employment has become genderised. In 1993, of the 3.7 million people unemployed in Vietnam, 60 per cent were women. In addition, women constitute half of the 6.5 million with unstable jobs. 70 per cent of women live in the rural areas, working an average of 16 to 18 hours per day, including additional work in home-based craft production (UN Commission on the Status of Women 1995). Women and children suffer most from poverty and food deficiency. The rates of malnutrition are so high that 70- 80 per cent of pregnant women suffer from anaemia and 50 per cent of children under five years suffer from malnutrition (Engender 1995:73).

The privatisation of large sectors of the economy is also threatening the systems of social security and equity that had previously been put in place. Despite being a poor country, Vietnam had previously achieved an impressive record in the provision of education and primary health care. This had produced a highly educated female workforce. When the war destroyed much of its social infrastructure, there was a sex-ratio imbalance due to the many males who were killed or handicapped during the war. The result was a very high female labour force participation. The current situation of high female unemployment stands in marked contrast to this earlier situation. For many women in Vietnam, economic transition has thus brought about economic and social disempowerment (see Phan 1992).

The transitional economies are supposedly moving from being command economies to being market economies. But as we contemplate the economic and social disarray found in some of these transitional economies, it is not at all clear where the transition will lead to.

Where is the region going as a whole?

The term 'development' implies a process of goal-oriented change. The goal that is now embraced universally as a developmental goal is to be a full-fledged market economy, as typified by the high-growth economies. But as shown above, the high-growth economies stand on top of a resource pyramid based on the lower-growth economies. Given this asymmetrical relationship, is it an inevitable goal that the lower-growth economies will develop into higher-growth economies? As discussed above, it is an ecological impossibility for all economies of the region indeed the world to develop through a mode of resource extraction dependent on an ever-expanding 'ghost acreage'.

Business circles world-wide laud the growth possibilities of the Asian region which has been dubbed



the 'growth basin of the 21st century'. But who benefits from such growth? And who bears the costs? The largely ignored flipside of this growth is the increasing impoverishment of the many, especially those living in the rural sector and especially women, together with the widespread degradation and destruction of the natural environment.

Due to the rapid economic growth taking place, the increasing disparities of wealth and poverty, and because there is a growing environmental crisis, the Southeast Asian region and the wider Asia and Pacific region, are at the cross-roads of development. There has to be goal-oriented change, if this critical situation is to be overcome. But whose goal, what goal is to be adopted and for what end?

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1 This paper is drawn from the book by Wee and Heyzer (1995), Gender, Poverty and Sustainable Development, which was first published for distribution at the Fourth World Conference on Women 1995. The argument set out in this paper is more fully elaborated upon in the book.

2 Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is a global network of women leaders from the South that has engendered much innovative thinking on development.

3 Asiaweek, October 20, 1995: 53

4 Lim and Pang, The Southeast Asian Economies: Resilient Growth and Expanding Linkages in Southeast Asian Affairs 1994: 23

5 Human Development Report 1994: 73

6 The New Internationalist No. 267 May 1995: 22

7 The New Internationalist No. 267 May 1995: 22

8 Business Week December 12, 1994: 4D-A

9 United Nations Children's Fund. The State of the World's Children 1995: 30

10 The mortality rates are given per 1,000 at risk: neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births, post-neonatal deaths per 1,000 surviving to the age of one month, children's deaths per 1,000 surviving to the age of one year but who did not survive till the age of 5.

11 "Traditional rural" = rural, uneducated, agricultural couple with the wife engaged in family work; "metropolitan elite" = urban couple with +7 yrs' education, where the wife is employed outside the home and the husband is in a professional or clerical occupation.

12 So far, sixteen of the largest developing economies have all sharply reduced tariffs, tax and other barriers to foreign direct investment (see Comes and Power, December 1994: 19).

13 Expanding web of trading ties sustain Asia's growth momentum, The Straits Times, 15 September 1995  
14 Lim and Pang, The Southeast Asian Economies: Resilient Growth and Expanding Linkages in Southeast Asian Affairs 1994: 30

15 The term itself was coined by Singapore's Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong.

16 See Financial Times 1992, cited in Heyzer, forthcoming.

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