

One of the principal obstacles now confronting the developing countries is their gigantic public and private external debt, which constitutes a palpable expression of the economic crisis and has serious political, economic and social consequences for these countries. The amount of the external debt obliges the developing countries to devote enormous sums of their already scarce export income to the servicing of the debt, which affects their peoples' lives and possibilities of development, with particular effects on women. In many developing countries there is a growing conviction that the conditions for the payment and servicing of the external debt cause those countries enormous difficulties and that the adjustment policies traditionally imposed are inadequate and lead to a disproportionate social cost.

The negative effects of the present international economic situation on the least developed countries have been particularly grave and have caused serious difficulties in the process of integrating women in development.

The growth prospects of the low-income countries have seriously deteriorated owing to the reduction in international economic co-operation, particularly the inadequate flow of official development assistance and the growing trade protectionism in the developed countries, which restricts the capacity of the low-income countries to attain the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women.

This situation is even more grave in the developing countries that are afflicted by drought, famine and desertification.

Paragraph 101

Despite significant efforts in many countries to transfer tasks traditionally performed by women to men or to public services, traditional attitudes still continue to persist and in fact have contributed to the increased burden of work placed on women. The complexity and multidimensional aspects of changing sex roles and norms and the difficulty of determining the specific structural and organizational requirements of such a change have hindered the formulation of measures to alter sex roles and to develop appropriate perspectives on the image of women in society. Thus, despite gains made by a few women, for the majority subordination in the labour force and in society has continued, through the exploitative conditions under which women often work have become more visible.

Paragraph 102

The effective participation of women in development has also been impeded by the difficult international economic situation, the debt crisis, poverty, continued population growth, rising divorce rates, increasing migration, and the growing incidence of female-headed households. Yet, neither the actual expansion of employment for women nor the recognition that women constitute a significant proportion of producers has been accompanied by social adjustments to ease women's burden of child and household care. The economic recession led to a reduction in investments, particularly in those services that allow greater societal sharing of the social and economic costs of child care and housework.

Paragraph 103

Insufficient awareness and understanding of the complex and multifaceted relationships between development and the advancement of women have continued to make policy, programme and project formulation difficult. While during the earlier