

In the early 18th century, the estimated total population of the globe was around one billion — the same number of people who now, at the end of the 20th century, live in the dark shadow of chronic poverty and undernutrition. Some 650 million of them are rural women in the Third World. And not only do women constitute a disproportionate percentage of the rural poor, but their numbers are increasing at an alarming rate: 50% in the past two decades.

Economic Advancement of Rural Women in Asia

family helper. As for female agricultural wage-labour, the effect has been mixed: in some cases demand has increased, in others reduced, depending on the extent of mechanisation. In addition, the accelerating migration of males to urban centres in search of work has left more women as heads of households, compelling them to run their family farms alone.

extension staff are women. Custom that hinders women from associating with males or participating as equals in the rural economy, together with the higher incidence of female illiteracy, are further obstacles.

Equally important, especially for families that have small plots or are landless, is the income women earn from wage labour or off-farm enterprises such as trading, weaving, basket-making, dressmaking and other home industries.

Getting the Support They Need
No less than poor male farmers and fishermen, poor rural women must have access to essential resources and support, for without them, they are trapped in a vicious and often downward cycle of poverty and declining productivity.

stitutions. Yet throughout much of Asia, women have limited access to credit. Lacking collateral, they are seen as poor credit risks; normally seeking small loans, they are not as attractive as large borrowers. Often illiterate and ignorant of the ways of banks, they shy away from approaching them.

Why this increase?
The reasons for this dramatic increase in the number of poor rural women are many. Aside from the fact that, as the population explosion continues, the ranks of the rural poor in general grow, women in most of Asia and other regions of the developing world are far more vulnerable than men to poverty and to the adverse effects of structural adjustment programmes; they also face greater obstacles in their efforts to grow food and earn income.

Rural Poverty is Doubly Cruel for Women

by Farhana Haque Rahman

programmes and projects, governmental agencies and financial institutions ignore, or give no more than token attention to, rural women's actual and potential contributions to family food security and income and to the rural economy in general.

develop new skills. Like men, they need the means to purchase essential materials and equipment and to make improvements on their land.

(US\$3) to buy a beehive and the other of 3,000 rupees (US\$71) for a carpet loom. She not only earned enough to house and feed her family and repay the loan, but also to set up a savings account.

NEPAL will have to bring its fertility rate down to replacement level in order to protect its fragile mountain environment.



Hand tilling without using animals is still in vogue in the northern part of the country. —Star photo

Asian women grow at least half of all the food eaten by their families, either in family fields or small home gardens. They plant, weed and harvest crops, process and sell them in the market. They are often in charge of raising livestock and poultry. And of course, women heads of households are full-fledged farmers in their own right.

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Organised by IFAD with the Asia and Pacific Development Centre and the Malaysian Ministry of Welfare and National Unity, the regional consultation for the economic advancement of rural women is the last of a series of four regional meetings devoted to the issue.

But, despite such reminders, most Nepalis in rural areas still prefer large families. They look at children as a source of income and old age support. A variety of cultural reasons also make children highly desirable in rural Nepal.

More Land Needed To Support Nepal's Growing Population

by Jan Sharma

progress of this initiative has been very disappointing and has resulted in the delay of assistance for population activities from several donors.

should have been launched in 1986 but had to be delayed until January this year.

Women Oppose Supply of Condoms to Their Husbands

KAMPALA: Women in Uganda are angry at organisations which supply condoms free of charge to their husbands as part of the drive to stop the spread of AIDS.

Many people, including President Yoweri Museveni were at first vehemently opposed to the encouragement of condom use, believing they encouraged promiscuity.

Indian films dare to show women as making choices other than what they are traditionally expected to do, and standing by these decisions

Indian Cinema Stops Stereotyping Women

live in England where his film company is based. Having grown a terrific ego, the husband became insensitive to his wife's feelings and openly has extra-marital affairs.

Abandoned, the wife learns to live by herself and to be strong enough to develop another relationship. Inevitably the husband comes back but, untypically of the Indian housewife, she refuses to accept him because she has learned to live without him.

In Indian cinema, it deals with the cracks within a marriage. These cracks are not so visible, but suddenly the couple discover they had changed.

That the woman's search or independence had to be made in this manner shocked the sensibilities of middle-class audiences. Nevertheless, Parama stands out as a strong indictment of the double standards of feudal society that persists even in a so-called urban and progressive setting.

Experts are of the opinion that the country should give more emphasis to population activities in its development projects instead of just making them more attractive to foreign donors.

Women's strength is also explored by the award-winning film Arth (Meaning). Directed by Mahesh Bhatt, a rising star

Dr Raghav Pant, a member of the National Commission on population, said Nepal's population is expected to increase by six million between 1981 and 2000 even if the fertility rate is brought down to replacement level.