The Global Economic Crisis: The View from Asia-Pacific[1]

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Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era

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1. Main transmission channels and the impact on financial flows

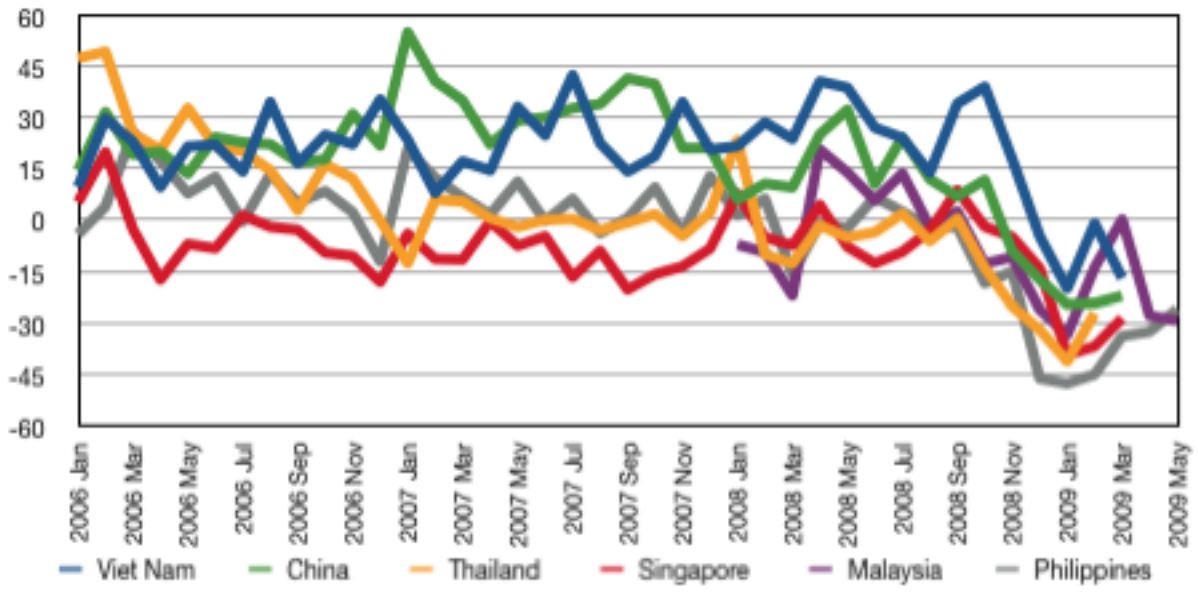
In understanding the impact of the global economic crisis on women in the Asia-Pacific region, this paper begins by looking at the changes in financial flows into the region due to the collapse of global demand brought by the crisis. Transmission channels are highlighted in this section. The decline in global demand and the collapse of financial markets in the developed countries immediately made itself felt in the Asia-Pacific countries through a decline in the external sources of financing for development. Each country experienced the impact to varying degrees depending on the importance of a particular financial flow to their economies.

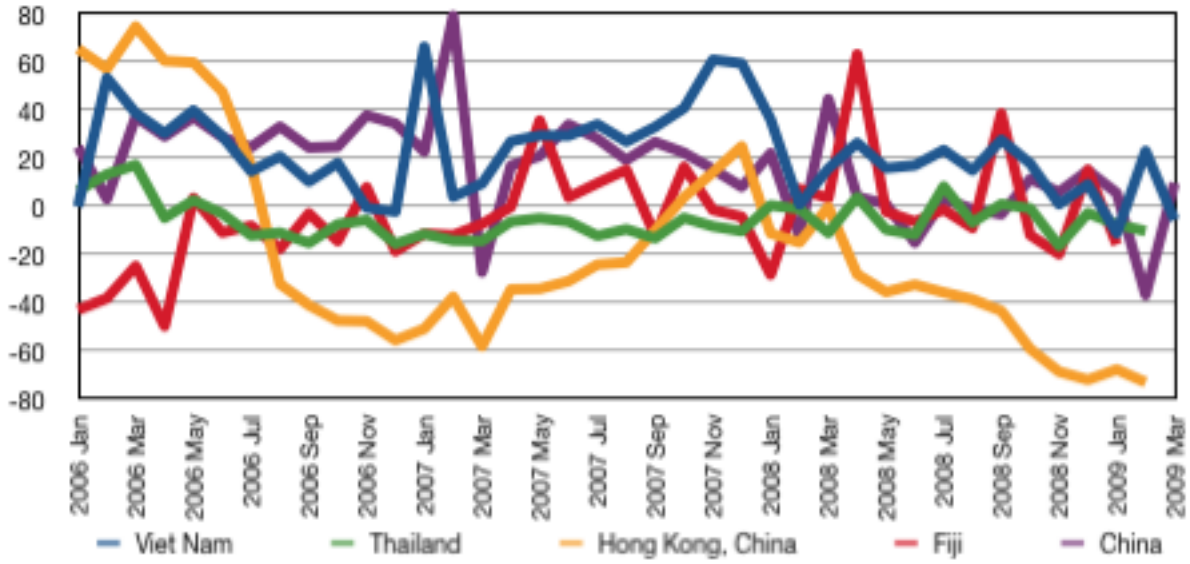
The tradable sectors

There seems to be some agreement among analysts that the financial sectors of emerging and developing market economies were not significantly exposed to the US financial markets that would cause serious destabilization. Asian financial markets were robust before the onset of the crisis. This is not to say that governments in the Asia-Pacific ignored this channel but many focused their attention elsewhere. Perhaps, the most immediate effect of the global economic crisis in the regions was experienced by the tradable sectors. For the region, exports grew in 2008 but the forecast for 2009 is negative growth as shown in Table 1 below.

change in %	2007	2008	2009f
Central Asia	34	49.2	-36.9
East Asia	18.9	13.4	-6.2
South Asia	24.5	12.4	-7.9
Southeast Asia	12.2	14.5	-17.7
Pacific	11.4	22.3	

The most open economies in East and Southeast Asia were hit the hardest (ADB 2009b). For some export commodities, however, declines were already recorded as early as the middle of 2008. Charts 1-3 below shows the growth rate of the export values of commodities known to be produced by women workers for some countries in the Asia-Pacific.




80
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2006 Jan
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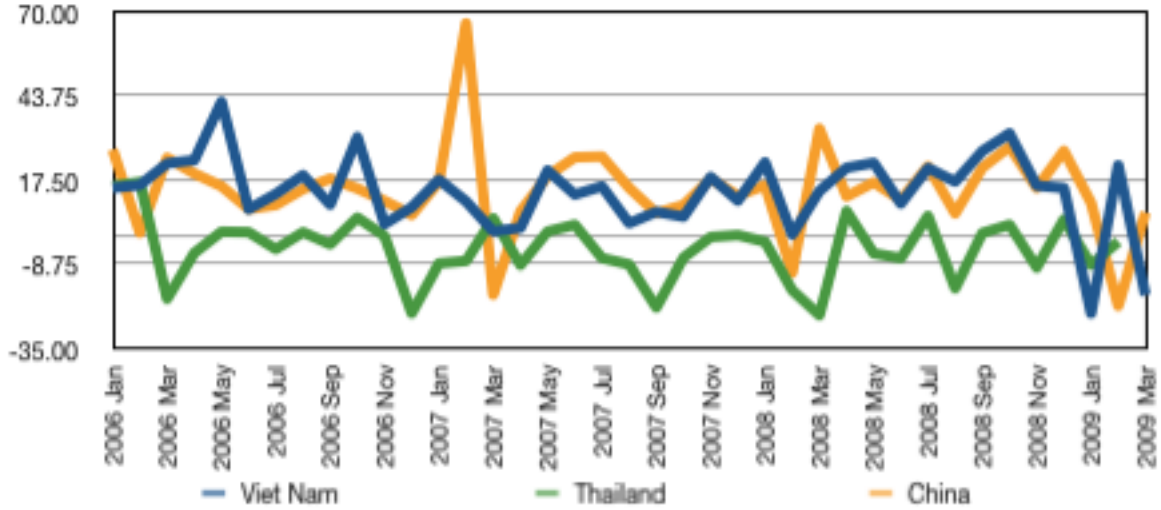
Viet Nam
Thailand
Hong Kong, China
Fiji
China


70.00
43.75
17.50
-8.75
-35.00
2006 Jan
2006 Mar
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2008 Jan
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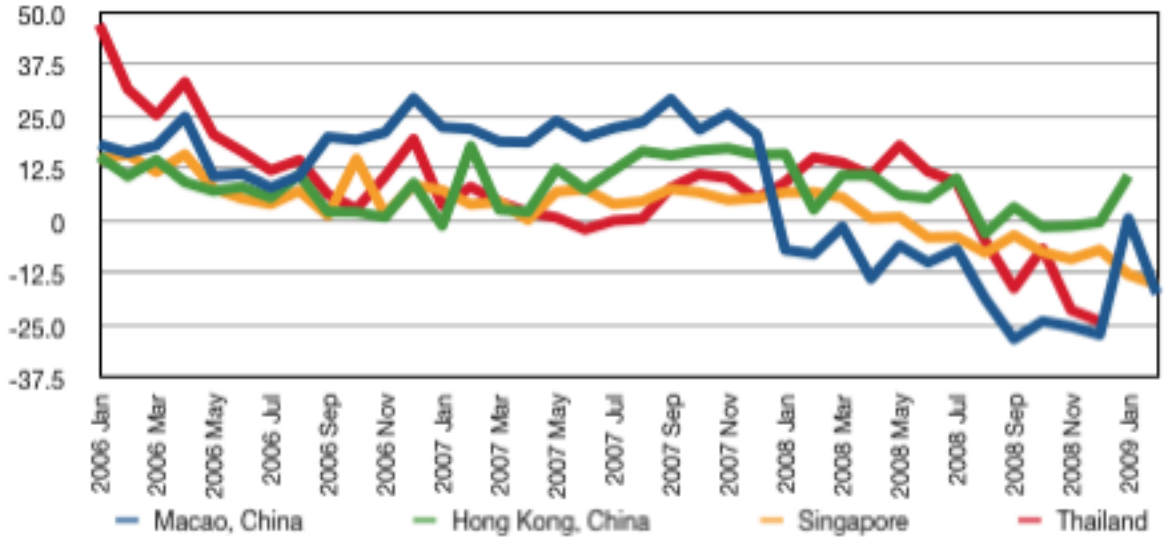
Viet Nam
Thailand
China

Tourist arrivals also declined sharply almost immediately after the US housing mortgage crash. Chart 4 below shows the decline for major tourist destinations in the region.



Countries that rely on earnings from commodities exports are also looking at sharp declines in prices even if volumes are maintained. Table 2 below presents growth rates of commodity prices as well as the forecast for 2009.

Change in %	2007	2008	2009f

Energy	10.8	45.1	-25.0
Oil	10.6	42.3	-26.4
Natural Gas	1.0	57.2	-10.8
Coal	33.9	97.8	-23.1
Non-energy	17.0	22.4	-19.1
Agriculture	20.0	28.4	-21.5
Foods	25.6	35.2	-23.3
Grains	26.1	50.9	-28.9
Raw Materials	9.0	13.0	-16.6
Metals & Minerals	12.0	5.0	-14.4
Copper	5.9	-0.6	-18.9

Foreign direct investment

Some countries in the region also saw a decline in inward foreign direct investments as Table 6 shows.

Georgia	41	-25
Kazakhstan	62	-23
Kyrgyz Rep	14	-7

Taiwan	5	-30
Bangladesh	7	-18
Bhutan	1,097	-59
Sri Lanka	22	-43
Malaysia	39	-6
Philippines	0	-48
Singapore	14	-28

Migration and remittances

Furthermore, Ratha and Mohapatra (2009) forecast declines in remittances inflows for developing countries, although their figures show modest declines for the region as shown in Table 4 below.

Developing countries	25.2	14.8	-7.3
East Asia and Pacific	23.4	19.6	-5.7
Europe & Central Asia	36.5	12.0	-14.9
South Asia	40.1	32.8	-3.6

Not only are workers in some industries expected to return home, there are indications that developed countries are tightening up their border controls. Ratha and Mohapatra (2009) highlight some of these controls:

- UK has raised minimum educational and financial requirements for highly skilled workers;
- Australia has reduced the number of skilled migrants it will accept from 133,500 to 115,00 for 2008-09;
- US economic stimulus package makes it difficult for firms to hire highly skilled foreign workers; and,
- Italy will be implementing tougher requirements for residency permits. They have also required doctors to report patients who are undocumented migrants while citizen's patrols have been authorized to pick-up illegal migrants.

2. Impact on women in the labor market

Estimates of the unemployment rate for the world shows a slight rise to 5.9% in 2008 from 5.7% in the previous year. Female unemployment rate is higher at 6.2% compared to male unemployment rate at 5.7% in 2008. There are sub-regional differences in the Asia-Pacific. In East Asia, male unemployment rate (4.9%) is higher than female unemployment rate (3.6%). In Southeast Asia and the Pacific as well as in South Asia, the world pattern is followed.

in %	1Q 2008	2Q 2008	3Q 2008	4Q 2008	1Q 2009	2Q 2009	3Q 2009
Hong Kong, China							
Male	3.7	3.8	4.0	4.5	6.0	6.4	6.3
Female	2.6	2.9	3.1	3.3	4.0	4.6	4.7
Japan							
Male	4.1	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.7	5.3	5.7

in %	1Q 2008	2Q 2008	3Q 2008	4Q 2008	1Q 2009	2Q 2009	3Q 2009
Female	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.6	4.6	4.9	5.1
Korea							
Male	3.7	3.4	3.5	3.5	4.3	4.2	4.1
Female	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.5	3.1	3.2	2.9
Philippines							
Male	7.8	8.1	7.4	7.0	8.0	7.5	
Female	6.7	7.9	7.2	6.5	7.2	7.4	
Singapore							
Male	2.6	3.7	2.6	3.2	4.2	5.4	3.8
Female	2.5	4.5	3.1	3.9	4.6	6.5	4.6
Sri Lanka							
Male	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.3	4.1	4.7	4.4
Female	8.2	8.4	7.8	8.2	7.5	9.1	8.1
Taiwan, China							
Male	4.2	4.0	4.3	5.1	6.2	6.5	6.8
Female	3.5	3.6	4.0	4.2	4.8	4.9	5.2
Thailand							
Male	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.4	2.2	1.7	
Female	1.6	1.3	1.0	1.2	1.9	1.8	

The manufacturing sector is worst hit when looking at employment declines for several quarters in 2008 and 2009. Table 6 below shows the continuous declines in employment for manufacturing for the countries where there is data, with the exception of Indonesia. Employment growth, however, is reported in agriculture and services during the first half of 2009. Towards the latter half of 2009, however, employment declines are also beginning to be recorded in these two sectors suggesting limits to the two sectors' absorptive capacity.

	2007	2008	1Q 2008	2Q 2008	3Q 2008	4Q 2008	1Q 2009	2Q 2009	3Q 2009
Agriculture									
Indonesia	1.6%	0.8%	0.2%	0.2%	1.4%	1.4%	0.8%	0.8%	-0.5%
Japan	-0.0%	-5.5%	3.8%	0.7%	-14.4%	-10.5%	33.5%	-15.2%	0.5%
Kazakhstan	-67.7%	-1.5%	-1.1%	-1.6%	-2.0%	-1.5%	-1.7%	-2.1%	-3.3%
Korea	-3.3%	-1.9%	-4.3%	-2.7%	-1.8%	0.8%	0.7%	-1.7%	-1.8%
Malaysia		-4.1%	-2.9%	-6.0%	-3.9%	-3.6%	-3.7%	3.8%	-2.2%
Philippines	0.9%	2.1%	1.3%	0.4%	5.3%	1.3%	0.4%	3.4%	-1.3%
Sri Lanka		6.5%	1.7%	3.0%	17.2%	4.4%	8.3%	4.0%	-8.1%

	2007	2008	1Q 2008	2Q 2008	3Q 2008	4Q 2008	1Q 2009	2Q 2009	3Q 2009
Taiwan	-2.0%	-1.4%	-0.7%	-0.5%	-3.2%	-1.4%	-0.3%	0.7%	2.8%
Thailand	1.1%	2.7%	0.4%	3.6%	3.4%	2.9%	0.8%	2.5%	
Manufacturing									
Hong Kong	-5.7%	-5.0%	-7.0%	-7.3%	-1.0%	-4.5%	-17.9%	-14.9%	-21.1%
Indonesia	4.2%	2.2%	2.9%	2.9%	1.5%	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%	2.3%
Japan	0.3%	-1.8%	-1.8%	-0.8%	-2.2%	-2.4%	-2.4%	-7.0%	-8.7%
Kazakhstan		1.8%	3.2%	2.2%	1.1%	0.9%	0.3%	-0.5%	-2.4%
Korea	-1.1%	-1.0%	-0.6%	-0.6%	-0.9%	-1.8%	-6.4%	-6.3%	-6.5%
Macau, China	-18.5%	2.6%	16.2%	-8.1%	4.3%	0.0%	-28.7%	-32.7%	-33.7%
Malaysia		-1.5%	-2.1%	-1.0%	-5.7%	2.8%	-5.7%	-8.5%	-2.4%
Philippines	0.2%	-4.3%	-2.6%	-6.2%	-3.4%	-5.4%	-3.8%	-1.5%	-0.4%
Sri Lanka	-2.3%	3.1%	2.6%	3.6%	8.1%	-1.7%	-2.7%	-8.7%	-9.3%
Taiwan	2.4%	1.5%	1.9%	2.1%	1.8%	0.2%	-3.1%	-3.8%	-3.5%
Thailand	2.1%	-3.0%	0.4%	-2.2%	-6.5%	-3.8%	-3.7%	-3.2%	
Services + construction and utilities									
Indonesia	5.3%	6.6%	9.4%	9.4%	4.0%	4.0%	4.1%	4.1%	4.6%
Japan	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	-0.4%	0.6%	0.7%	-0.3%	-0.1%	-0.3%

	2007	2008	1Q 2008	2Q 2008	3Q 2008	4Q 2008	1Q 2009	2Q 2009	3Q 2009
Kazakhstan		5.3%	6.1%	5.4%	5.4%	4.5%	2.2%	1.6%	2.5%
Korea	2.3%	1.2%	1.7%	1.4%	1.2%	0.6%	0.6%	0.9%	1.7%
Macau, China	16.5%	7.9%	11.1%	10.1%	6.4%	4.6%	3.7%	2.3%	-1.4%
Malaysia		4.2%	2.2%	3.5%	9.3%	2.2%	5.7%	5.6%	4.5%
Philippines	4.6%	2.2%	0.4%	-0.2%	4.1%	4.7%	3.3%	5.8%	5.6%
Sri Lanka	1.5%	-1.5%	2.0%	3.4%	-10.6%	-0.2%	-1.4%	-2.1%	10.1%
Taiwan	1.9%	1.1%	1.2%	1.4%	1.1%	0.7%	-0.5%	-0.9%	-1.0%
Thailand	1.9%	3.4%	2.9%	4.5%	3.5%	2.7%	4.6%	3.9%	

Employment growth in the other sectors has likely supported the shifts in employment away from industry. Table 7 below shows the sectors where male and female workers have moved between 2006 and 2008. Sectoral employment shares show that, in East Asia and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, female workers shifted out of agriculture and industry to services while males shifted out of industry into agriculture and services. In South Asia, female workers shifted out of industry and services into agriculture while male workers shifted out of agriculture into industry and services. Unfortunately, more recent data is not available and it is difficult to tell whether these shifts continued in 2009, particularly when noting the 3rd quarter figures in Table 6.

Shares	Agriculture			Industry			Services		
in %	1996	2006*	2008*	1996	2006*	2008*	1996	2006*	2008*
World	41.9	36.1	34.5	21.1	21.9	21.6	37.0	42.0	43.8
Males	40.5	35.2	33.6	23.8	24.9	25.6	35.8	39.9	40.8
Females	44.2	37.5	35.9	16.9	17.2	15.8	38.9	45.3	48.3
East Asia	48.5	40.9	40.6	24.3	25.6	23.7	27.2	33.5	35.7
Males	45.2	38.6	39.1	25.5	26.7	25.4	29.3	34.7	35.5
Females	52.5	43.8	42.3	22.8	24.2	21.8	24.7	32.0	35.9
SE Asia & Pacific	51.0	45.4	42.5	16.5	18.6	19.4	32.5	36.0	38.1
Males	45.2	38.6	42.8	25.5	26.7	21.7	29.3	34.7	35.4
Females	52.7	44.7	41.9	13.5	16.5	16.2	33.8	38.8	41.9
South Asia	59.7	49.4	47.7	15.2	21.0	22.2	25.1	29.6	30.1
Males	54.0	44.3	40.7	16.8	22.3	24.8	29.2	33.3	34.4
Females	73.7	61.9	64.9	11.3	17.8	15.7	15.0	20.3	19.4

There are also differences in the class of workers shares of employment by sex. Table 8 below shows that, globally, there was a decline in the share of contributing family workers to total employment, as well as, a decline in the share of employers to total employment. At the same time, there was a corresponding rise in the share of wage and salaried workers. This might indicate a greater pressure to produce regular income so that some household members are asked to look for jobs or running a business may no longer be viable. East Asia reflects this shift to

wage and salaried work for both males and females. However, in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, there has been a shift to own-account work, with the shift for male workers larger than for female workers. In South Asia, there was also a shift to own-account work but the shift for female workers is larger than for male workers. Own-account work has often been associated with informal sector work and is associated with vulnerable employment lacking social protection. These figures are reinforced by Horn (2009) who also finds an increase in the number of people joining the informal sector based on surveys conducted in India and Thailand.

Total	Wage and Salaried Worker			Employers			Own-account Workers			Contributing Family Workers		
	1996	2006*	2008*	1996	2006*	2008*	1996	2006*	2008*	1996	2006*	2008*
World	43.1	46.9	48.0	3.4	2.9	2.5	30.8	33.0	33.0	22.7	17.2	16.5
Males	44.5	47.4	48.6	4.2	3.6	3.2	36.9	37.6	37.2	14.4	11.4	11.0
Females	41.1	46.0	47.0	2.1	1.9	1.5	21.5	26.2	26.8	35.4	26.0	24.6
East Asia	32.4	42.6	45.1	2.8	1.2	1.5	33.4	38.2	35.5	31.4	18.0	18.0
Males	36.9	46.0	48.9	3.8	1.5	1.5	40.0	40.8	36.7	19.3	11.7	12.9
Females	26.9	38.3	40.7	1.6	0.8	1.4	25.2	34.9	34.1	46.2	25.9	23.9

Total	Wage and Salaried Worker			Employers			Own-account Workers			Contributing Family Workers		
SE Asia & Pacific	33.0	38.8	36.4	2.1	2.1	2.5	34.8	35.2	39.5	30.1	23.9	21.6
Males	36.7	41.5	38.6	2.9	2.7	3.4	43.0	41.2	46.5	17.3	14.5	11.5
Females	27.6	35.0	33.4	1.0	1.1	1.2	23.2	26.9	29.6	48.3	37.0	35.8
South Asia	17.1	20.8	21.5	1.5	1.0	1.4	45.6	47.4	51.4	35.8	30.8	25.6
Males	20.0	23.4	24.4	1.9	1.3	1.7	56.9	56.8	59.0	21.2	18.5	14.9
Females	10.2	14.6	14.5	0.4	0.4	0.8	17.8	24.4	33.0	71.6	60.6	51.7

3. Asia-Pacific Governments Responses to the Crisis

An interesting question would be whether governments in the Asia-Pacific have been able to design responses that take the labor market shifts described above into consideration. In particular, have governments responded in a way that takes gender equality into consideration? Many governments in the region announced policy responses to the global crisis and declared the use of economic stimulus packages to help arrest the economic decline.

Khatiwada (2009) found in a survey of 32 fiscal stimulus packages that financial measures outweighed fiscal measures in the packages. In the same study this time looking at 22 countries, spending on infrastructure was three times higher in developing countries compared to developed countries. Khatiwada (2009) also found that spending for labor market measures amounted to 3% of the packages for developed countries and only 0.2% of the packages for developing countries. A much larger portion was spent on social protection. About 10.8% of the fiscal stimulus packages of developed countries was devoted to social protection while developing countries gave social protection a 6.8% share of total spending.

Based on figures from the UN ESCAP (2009) and the ADB (2009), about $1 trillion dollars has been made available by 14 countries to fund their respective fiscal stimulus packages. Announcements were made at various times in 2008 and 2009. Half of this amount belongs to China as shown in Table 9 below. Table 9 also shows that with the exception of China and Korea, most packages amounted to a small share of GDP even for those countries. It is possible that these countries wish to maintain either a moderate budget deficit to GDP ratio or a very balanced budget.

		Stimulus	2008 Budget Deficit	
Area	Amount (US$ B)	% of GDP		Date Announced
China	585	13	-0.4	Nov 08, Jan 09
Korea	84.4	13	-1.7	Dec 08, Jan & Mar 09
Kazakhstan	17		-2.1	Nov 08
Russia	90	4.5		Apr 09
Bangladesh	0.5	0.6	-4.7	Apr 09

		Stimulus	2008 Budget Deficit	
India	60		-6.0	Dec 08
Sri Lanka	0.141	0.3	-6.8	Dec 08
Indonesia	6.1	1.2	-0.1	Jan 09
Malaysia	1.9	1	-4.7	Nov 08
Singapore	13.7	0.8	5.7	Jan 09
Thailand	3.3	1.2	-0.3	Jan 09
Viet Nam	1	1.1	-4.7	Dec 08
Taiwan	5.6			
Japan	125	2		Aug & Oct 08, Feb 09

Investment Support

As mentioned earlier, the economic stimulus packages covered mostly financial sector measures, which is understandable given the nature of the causes of the global economic crisis. Support to industries, including use of investment incentives, have been made available through the stimulus packages. Table 10 gives an indication of the kinds of support found in the various packages. Tax measures and loan guarantees appear to be among the most common forms of support. Several governments mention an interest in supporting small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). Without further details in the programming details of these measures, it would be difficult to asses whether declared support for SMEs would benefit those men and women who have become own-account workers since the onset of the crisis. But if investment guarantees or tax measures are the kinds of support that are intended for SMEs, then it would seem unlikely that own-account workers will directly benefit from these measures.

China	Technological innovation (160 billion); Direct tax cuts for 9 industries: auto, steel, shipbuilding, textile, machine-manufacturing, electronics and information industries, light industry, petrochemicals, nonferrous metals and logistics; Support and development of high-tech and service industries*; Remove loan quotas on commercial lenders*
	Expedited investment spending on scientific and technical innovation/upgrades
Korea	Vitalizing venture enterprises; Increasing SME guarantees (KRW 3.4 trillion**); Tax breaks for investment in factories (KRW 3 trillion)**
	Energy conservation, recycling and clean energy development to build an energy-saving economy; Green transportation networks and clean water supplies to upgrade the quality of life and environment; Carbon reduction and stable supply of water resources to protect the earth and future generations; Building of industrial and information infrastructure and technology development to use energy efficient the future
	Maintaining job security and revitalizing provincial economies and supporting industries with future growth potential
Kazakhstan	Financial sector stabilization; Real sector development; Support for SMEs; Development of agro-industrial sector; Rebalance taxes towards natural resources sector and away from non-oil sectors
Russian Federation	Maintenance and enhancement of the industrial and technological potential; Enhancement of stability of the national financial system
Turkmenistan	Allocation of funds to socio-economic projects and investment in low-risk assets
Bangladesh	Cash subsidies to exporters (Taka 4,500 million), including higher cash incentives for jute and jute goods, leather and leather goods, and frozen foods**; Agriculture farm subsidies** (Taka 15,000 million) and agricultural loan recapitalization facility (Taka 5,000 million); Power sector (Taka 6,000 million)

India	Support to exports, textile and handicrafts sector (approx. USD70M**), housing, SMEs; Cut of 4% in excise duties on all manufactured goods, except petroleum products
Sri Lanka	Incentives for the agricultural and industrial export sectors ; Cuts in energy prices for exporters**
Indonesia	Rural development (IDR 0.6 trillion); Help for export sector and boost export financing*; Reductions in corporate and value-added taxes**; Diesel subsidy and discounted electricity rates for industries**
Malaysia	Investment funds to promote strategic industries and high-speed broadband (MYR1.9 billion); Telecommunications, technology, tourism, agriculture and life sciences**; Reduction in import duties for iron and steel products and cement**; Incentives for firms in the construction sector**; Promotion of entrepreneurial credit facilities**; Provision of guarantee schemes for private firms**; Support to SMEs***
Singapore	"Special risk sharing initiative," government guarantees on working capital loans; Tax concessions to support cash flow**
Philippines **	Tax exemptions
Thailand	Tax measures to boost real estate sector, SMEs and the tourism industry; Industry promotion for services**; Easy loans for business enterprises**
Viet Nam	4% interest subsidy on loans to SMEs; Measures to support manufacturing and export sectors
Taiwan POC**	Financial incentives to SMEs; Interest subsidies to home buyers; Tax holidays for new investments; Export promotion
Japan	Assistance to SMEs (including tax cuts on SMEs and tax break for investment in energy-saving facilities); Funds for domestic banks to support SMEs*

Public Works and Infrastructure

Infrastructure spending has also received a lot of attention. The infrastructure sector is seen by governments as having an almost immediate effect on pushing up aggregate demand through public-sector spending in this area with the added benefit of providing many employment opportunities. If we are to take into account labor market segmentation, however, there is the possibility that males would benefit from public projects based on construction and engineering. Table 11 below provides some information on the nature of the public works projects that some of the countries in the region are planning to implement, if they haven't already.

China	Temporary moratorium in firing in state-owned enterprises Infrastructure construction of railways, highways, airports, power grids (CNY 1.8 trillion)*
India	USD4 billion for roads, ports, and infrastructure**
Indonesia	Roads and irrigation**
Japan	Financial support to local governments that hire job seekers
Korea	Increase in social over head capital investment with focus on investments in construction projects, including leading projects for advancement of the metropolitan economy and provincial traffic network expansion* Green transportation networks and clean water supplies* Building of industrial and information infrastructure and technology development*
Malaysia	Public transport and military facilities* Rural infrastructure development: housing, schools, and hospital buildings**
Northern Mariana Islands	Schools and hospital buildings**
Philippines	Comprehensive livelihood and emergency employment program**

Thailand	Infrastructure investment in mass transit; transport and communication; energy; communication; healthcare, housing; water resources*, Rural infrastructure**
Australia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Viet Nam	Have indicated that there will be infrastructure projects but no details readily available
Taiwan	To spend TWD58.3 billion; details not readily available
Georgia	To spend US$1.3 billion; details not readily available

Infrastructure programs and projects, for example, can learn from the experience of the Bangladesh Local Government Engineering Development and, possibly India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Social infrastructure might also prove to be as useful as the typical public works projects of roads and bridges. New schools or school improvements and new health clinics can be an infrastructure base that would eventually be staffed by women, who are "traditionally" viewed as teachers or care providers. China's stimulus package includes provisions for building new clinics, for example. Even infrastructure programs that improve public safety can support women's mobility and support their economic activities.

Labor Market Measures

Where infrastructure programs are expected to provide employment, labor market measures are expected to ease the transition from employment to unemployment and the search process for another job. Table 12 gives an indication of the types of labor market measures found in Asia-Pacific stimulus packages. It is with these set of measures that it would be possible to find out whether governments have been responsive the needs of their labor markets. Very few countries in the region have unemployment insurance. China and Viet Nam, however, have plans of implementing such a program but are in process of working out the arrangements. In the case of Viet Nam, an initial program based on a 1% levy on wages that firms are expected to pay has

already been implemented. Some of the measures in the economic stimulus packages are directed at employers and come in the form of hiring incentives or subsidies to wage costs. Measures directed at workers are almost exclusively focused on some form of training, skills enhancement or capacity-building. Without knowing the nature of the training, it is difficult to tell whether the needs of own-account workers have been incorporated. Neither is there any clear sense that shifts could involve moving from one industry to another, which may be difficult for workers with industry-specific skills or worse firm-specific skills.

Country	Extension of Unemployment Benefits	Hiring Incentives for Employers	Measures directed at Workers
Australia		Funds to employers for staff development and training programs	Increase in productivity training places from 57,000 to 113,000
China	Recommended by the central government	Reduction in medical and accident insurance premiums; flexible working hours and pay for service sector firms	Nationwide vocational training programs for migrant workers returning home after losing jobs
Indonesia			Job training; Voluntary transmigration programs for laid-off workers to areas less affected by the crisis Tax cuts for low and middle-income workers**
Japan	Yes	Increased wage subsidies for SMEs employers; subsidies for employers who hire temporary workers as regular workers	Support for non-regular workers in job placement

Country	Extension of Unemployment Benefits	Hiring Incentives for Employers	Measures directed at Workers
Korea	Support vulnerable workers (outside the boundaries of a social safety net) who are put on unpaid temporary leave	Tax exemption and extension on tax submission periods for employers that maintain their workforce	Job training through expansion of internship system, increased job positions for underprivileged*
Malaysia		Yes	Training for re-trenched workers; re-training unemployed graduates over the next 2-3 years
Philippines			Capacity building for the unemployed**
Russia		Yes*	Yes*
Singapore		"Job Credit Programme"; cash transfer for employers to cover part of their wage bills*	Skills enhancement programs**
Thailand			Capacity building for the unemployed
Sri Lanka**		Payment of 5% of revenues as incentive for exporters (tea, textiles, tourism, leather, rubber) who maintain 2008 revenues and do not retrench workers	
Viet Nam	New unemployment insurance program		

Labor market measures can aim to diversify women's occupations so that they are able to expand their employment opportunities. For example, a few governments have alluded to providing investment support to "green economy" and to the high value-added sectors. Supporting labor market measures can provide training opportunities that help women take advantage of employment opportunities in these new industries as the economies move towards recovery. The manufacturing sector continues to employ more males than females and, yet, it is this sector that is viewed as contributing the most to growth and industrialization. There has also been an observed correlation between wage increases and productivity increases, including those associated with increased technological content. A greater number of women workers still face barriers to these occupations and industries.

Social Protection Measures

It might be argued that given the small number of labor market measures found in the stimulus packages, social safety nets and social protection could provide additional support to workers who have lost their jobs. Indeed, there are several measures included in the stimulus packages although as mentioned earlier, the amount allocated is a small portion of the packages. The social programs supported were in the areas of housing, health, pensions and social security. A very common form of support is income-support or cash transfers. As with the other stimulus programs, it is difficult to evaluate the responsiveness of the social safety nets and social protection, especially from a gender perspective. It would be useful if it were possible to identify which program was new in response to the crisis or whether they were a continuation of an existing program that was part of a poverty reduction strategy.

Country	Social Safety Nets and Social Protection
China	Low-income housing (CNY 280 billion); Improving rural living standards (CNY 370 billion); Health care reform to provide basic medical security to everyone; improve the quality of medical services; make medical services more accessible (CNY 850 billion)

Country	Social Safety Nets and Social Protection
Korea	Increase welfare support to stabilize livelihoods of low-income classes and provide aggressive support in reducing child care costs; Increased spending for medical services to low-income earners**; Revitalizing provincial economies
Georgia	Increase in pension package; state co-financed health insurance package available to all
Russian Federation	Enhancement of social protection
Northern Mariana Islands	Create jobs and provide food assistance to low-income families
Bangladesh	Expenditure on social security (Tk. 3,740 million)
Pakistan**	Re-prioritized expenditures for 2008-09 in order to increase spending on social safety nets; Benazir Income Support Program was launched to help poor families with monthly cash benefits (PKR 34 billion)
Philippines	Waiver on penalties on loans from social security institutions; Investments in public health care and food security programs**; Increased allocation to social insurance**; Conditional cash transfers to provide food, health and educational subsidy to the poorest of the poor**
Thailand	One time cost of living allowance of THB2,000 for those earning less than THB15,000 per month; Extension of 5 public service subsidies programme for 6 months; Free education for students; “Sufficient economy fund for improvement of quality of life” for rural villages; Old age support payment of THB500 per month; Increased spending for health**

Country	Social Safety Nets and Social Protection
Viet Nam	Projects designed to support social security and welfare
Indonesia**	Direct cash transfer programs; Rice for the poor; School assistance program
Malaysia**	Investments in basic social services; Increase in contributions to the Provident Fund; Home construction for low- and middle-income groups; Welfare benefits for poor and vulnerable
Singapore**	Rejuvenating public housing estates; Upgrading health and insurance; Income supplements and direct assistance to households; Increased targeted help for vulnerable groups
Japan	Assistance toward people's daily lives, including fixed sum stipend Efforts to revive local economy
Taiwan POC**	Subsidies to low-income households
Australia	Support payments for low and middle-income families (AUD 3.9 billion); Free ceiling insulation for around 2.7 million homes; AUD 950 one-off cash payments to eligible families, single workers, students, drought-affected farmers, and others
New Zealand	Building new state houses and upgrade and renovate state houses

In order to respond to the labor market shifts discussed in the earlier section, social protection measures need to contribute to the shifting away from informal (household-based or community-based) safety nets. Existing formal structures could be expanded to cover vulnerable workers. Care for the elderly and children, oftentimes unpaid, falls heavily on women's shoulders and public support to this type of care can mean a lot in facilitating women's access to economic

opportunities. China, for example, is spending a large portion of their economic stimulus package on improving their health care system, especially with respect to the urban-rural differentials. In much of the Asia-Pacific, health spending is mostly an out-of-pocket expense that has severe consequences on the financial status of a poor household when it comes in as a shock , especially so when the health crisis is in addition to an employment crisis.

A final consideration in evaluation and assessment of stimulus packages is an understanding of "modes of delivery." Cash transfers as mentioned seem to be a popular delivery method for making certain services accessible. This method needs to be evaluated from the larger frame of employment generation policies and public provisioning. How will cash transfer programs strengthen or add to the benefits of employment as well as increase the accessibility of publicly-provided services? If they do not, then what additional values do cash transfer programs provide with respect to the improvements of well-being?

4. Tentative steps towards gender-equitable public policies

As we begin to consider lessons learned from the current global economic crisis, it will be instructive to note the kinds of lessons that learned by countries in the region during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Two things are of note. One is that sources of liquidity are limited but necessary for securing macroeconomic stability. In 1997, East Asia learned the hard way and found that their efforts at obtaining liquidity were came with very stringent requirements. Over the most recent decade, therefore, countries in the region accumulated gross international reserves that were more than the recommended rule-of-thumb of 3 months' worth of imports as Table 14 shows. Meanwhile, these same countries began a discussion on establishing their own regional sources of liquidity exemplified by the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), which is a broad-based intergovernmental network that discuss and operate currency swap arrangements and monitor financial flows in the region. The initiative will launch in 2010 with a value of $120 billion and will be available to the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China, Korea, and Japan. Indeed, part of the relative stability that the Asia-Pacific region is experiencing during this period of crisis has come to depend on the strength of this initiative and the accumulated international reserves of each country.

Area	2004	2008
China	$614.5b	$1,980b
Korea	199.1	201.2
India	141.4	309.7 (‘07)
Bangladesh	2.7	6.1
Nepal	1.5	2.5
Singapore	112.5	174.2
Thailand	49.8	111.0
Philippines	16.2	37.6
Viet Nam	6.3	23.0
Uzbekistan	2.1	10.1
Kazakhstan	9.3	19.4
PNG	0.6	2.1

A second lesson lies in the area of social protection. Perhaps, more accurately, it is a lesson that has not been learned by the countries in the region. According to UN ESCAP (2008), only a small portion of the population in the region has some form of social protection. Some of the statistics cited are that only 20% of the population has access to health care assistance, only 30% of the elderly receive pensions, and only 20% of the unemployed and underemployed have access to labor market programmes. Chart 5 below provides a breakdown of the sources of health care financing for countries in the Asia-Pacific region and it is easy to see that for many, health care is still an out-of-pocket expense. Thus, when looking at the social protection programs and the labor market measures found in the economic stimulus packages announced by governments in the region, one can’t help but feel how much more needs to be done to expand coverage and to ensure that a gender perspective in used in the design of these packages.

Structural issues are important and cannot be forgotten even when the lessons above are fully learned. The achievement of development goals continue to be elusive even as countries in the Asia-Pacific ably demonstrate economic growth. Among the structural issues that need attention from a gender-equitable perspective are employment and industrialization strategies and the systematic use of automatic macroeconomic stabilizers.

Expand policy space for industrialization strategies that generate gender-equitable employment

The political battles over a globally coordinated response to the global economic crisis are captured by the developing countries' demand for more policy space. The policy alternatives that feminist leaders are expected to carry needs to reflect the value of socially reproductive activities

or the care economy. But these policy alternatives appear to be difficult to carry out unless the policy space is wide enough to do so. The case is that many of the demands overlap with social protection, which requires increased public spending.

Feminist demands need some form of expression at the global level. While women's movements and feminist movements may be able to conceive of gender-equitable public policy at the national level in relation to our respective nation-states, dependence and inter-dependence of economies demands that, whatever the shape these gender-equitable public policies take, these movements also need to be able to design multilateral institutions that will pursue gender-equitable public policies at the international level. In other words, it will be important for women's movements to secure their gains at the national level by ensuring that the global environment favors instead of restricts the pursuit of feminist alternatives.

Alternatives to unhampered trade liberalization, such as those discussed in Chang and Grabel (2004), Lall (2003, 2001), Chang (2003), and Rodrik (2001), offer convincing approaches. However, these have yet to use any gender perspective in their formulations. These alternatives acknowledge the benefits of export-orientation because of advantages brought on by economies of scale in production. More importantly, they discuss upgrading of technological content and skills content of production combined with a set of appropriate incentive structures. However, the chosen industries may not equally benefit women. For example, the choice of industry to develop can have a gender bias in itself because the favoured industries may not necessarily be crucial for social reproduction (such as the car industry as opposed to choosing the education sector). Or, gender biases exist in skills formation and in the access and use of technology. These alternative policies must still be examined further in order to take gender concerns into account. For sometime now, feminists have been critical of the manner in which women have become incorporated into many export-oriented industries because of the employment trade-off with poor working conditions as well as the inability to look at the dynamic relationships among the genders within their respective households (Razavi, 1999).

Finally, the pursuit of economic growth has led to an urban bias and an external markets bias in economic structures. The focus on manufactured exports has meant a neglect of agriculture and

food security as well as a weakening of productive capacity that is able to service domestic demand. The global economic crisis demonstrates that integration with global markets should be understood as integration with the cycles of global markets.

Strengthening automatic macroeconomic stabilizers to finance social protection while minimizing output volatility

Debates on the role of monetary and fiscal policy in growth and development continue to characterize approaches to crisis mitigation and resolution. Alternative approaches point to a re-orientation towards focusing on output stability rather than price stability (Spiegel, 2007). In assessing success or failure of a policy, it is no longer useful to concentrate on economic growth indicators. Employment generation has lost its centrality in macroeconomic policymaking such that the recent decades have produced what has been called "jobless" growth.

In addition to a focus on employment growth, there is a need to strengthen systems of automatic macroeconomic stabilizers. Automatic macroeconomic stabilizers have two intertwined components: the revenue generation part that takes advantage of income growth by through progressive taxation and the social protection part that uses savings from the growth periods to finance the spending during downturns. Taxes that attempt to capture speculative bubbles, for example, are helpful to the revenue generation arsenal. Stabilization funds, meanwhile, ensure that financing is not jeopardized during a recession, when it is needed the most. The automatic nature provides the added benefit of protection from political capture. Automatic macroeconomic stabilizers are important from a gender perspective because these help ease the burden of unpaid work when publicly provided services have secure sources of financing.

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