

WOMEN AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT – SELECTED CASE STUDIES

PREFACE

For many Commonwealth developing countries, stabilisation and structural adjustment have been a necessary part of life in recent years, but most of these countries' governments have been concerned about the adverse effects these programmes have been having on those of their people who are in vulnerable positions. Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs considered that women were particularly adversely affected by some of the measures and in 1987 they recommended an expert group be set up to study the impact of structural adjustment on women. Their recommendation was supported by Commonwealth Finance Ministers and approved by Commonwealth Heads of Government.

A Commonwealth Expert Group was set up in 1988 and presented its report, **Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s**, in June 1989. At the Group's first meeting its members recognised that the lack of sex-disaggregated data and the scarcity of studies on the effects of adjustment measures on women were important constraints, not only to their work but to the formulation of more effective and beneficial government policies.

To help fill this lacuna, the Group asked the Commonwealth Secretary-General to commission some case studies. Nine such studies were commissioned with generous financial support from CIDA, UNICEF and UNDP. They were carried out mainly by local researchers in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The researchers collected and analysed available data on the impact which the stabilisation and structural adjustment policies had on women in each of their four main roles (producers, home managers, mothers and community organisers). The studies provided data on the policies adopted, assessed their impact on women, and made recommendations and suggested priority actions to improve the situation of the women concerned. The authors called for gender-sensitive adjustment programmes; for more gender-disaggregated data to be collected by officials sensitised to make this possible; for better monitoring of the status of women; for enhancing their role in production through improved access to inputs and support services as well as to education and training; for any cuts in social services to be selected so as to minimise their impact on women; for women and girls 'at risk' of malnutrition to be targeted in special programmes; and for women's organisations to be more involved in decision-making.

The case studies provide much needed information from selected Commonwealth countries which have implemented various types of stabilisation and structural adjustment package with differing degrees of success. They give useful insights into the recent developments and experiences of relevance. These are brought together in a final study which carries out a comparative review, focusing on the main issues raised earlier and pointing to the gaps which remain to be filled by future research.

It is hoped that the studies will stimulate interest in what is a vital aspect of the ongoing efforts of policy-makers to enhance the design and implementation of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies and programmes for the general good, including the good of those who make up about half the adult population.

B Persaud
Director and Head
Economic Affairs Division