Seminar on Gender and Access in South Asia
BRAC Centre Auditorium, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15-18 November 2006
Organized by the IUSSP Scientific Panel on Gender and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), with financial support from the World Bank

Background and Purpose of the Seminar
Public discourse on gender in South Asia has tended to focus on the family and culture as the primary culprits in creating gender inequality. Frequently public policies tend to be less effective in addressing the private domain but have a tremendous potential for creating as well as redressing inequalities in the public domain. While policies must work within the cultural context, rigidity or permeability of cultural boundaries remain poorly understood.

South Asia provides an interesting opportunity to address this issue because there are tremendous variations within individual countries in gender relations and cultural norms but at the same time, there are many similarities across national boundaries. So, a regional discourse on gender and access in South Asia has a tremendous potential for informing public policy.

This seminar was set up to provide empirical work on emerging issues in research on gender inequality, especially concerning access to public services, market opportunities and public participation. The Social Development Unit in the South Asia Region of the World Bank, which is undertaking a Country Gender Assessment for Bangladesh, felt that this IUSSP seminar on South Asia was therefore timely and consistent with its own work on Gender.

Selection of Participants
A call for papers was disseminated through emails to the IUSSP membership (2500 members and student associates), and advertised on the IUSSP website. Additionally, in order to reach non IUSSP members in the South Asia region, the call for papers was placed on several regional avenues. The call for papers was advertised in the Economic and Political Weekly, a prominent Indian journal as well as Demography India the primary journal of Indian Association for the Study of the Population. It was also placed on the website of the Pakistan Population Association A total of 188 candidates submitted abstracts or papers via IUSSP’s online submission system, of which 20 were selected by seminar organizers. One candidate was unable to submit a final paper and thus only 19 papers were finally submitted for the seminar (See list of papers, Annex 1). Great effort was made to select diverse participants at different career stage to allow for interesting interaction. Participants varied in their seniority level ranging from graduate students to such senior researchers as the president of the Pakistan Association for Women’s Studies.

In addition, several prominent researchers in the field were invited to act as discussants at the seminar, and others were invited as observers. However, their presence as well as that of several other international participants (including the delegate from Afghanistan) was limited by the sudden political turmoil in the form of a nation-wide blockade that locked Bangladesh into a state of immobility throughout the duration of the seminar.
Final participants included academicians and researchers based in educational and research institutions as well as international agencies, working on South Asia from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, USA, UK and Switzerland. They presented papers from the perspective of their respective disciplines of economics, demography, public health, public policy, sociology, gender studies, etc. Apart from paper presenters, policy makers and practitioners participated in the concluding session. *(see List of participants, Annex 2)*

**Structure and activities**

The seminar was conducted over three days. On the first day, organizers of the seminar, Sonalde Desai (IUSSP) and Simeen Mahmud (BIDS) made welcomed the participants and gave a brief overview of the background and purpose of the seminar. Paper presentations began after the round of introductions of participants and observers. After each presentation, the presenter responded to the questions and comments from participants and observers. The moderator summed up the papers and discussions at the end of each session. A total of eight sessions were held during the three-day period, with three sessions on the first two days and two sessions on the third day. A documentary titled ‘I Have Something to Say’ on the rights of garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, produced by Simeen Mahmud was also shown on the third day. *(see Seminar Programme, Annex 3)*

A cultural programme was arranged at the end of the second day and a dinner was organized on a riverboat outside the capital city on the third day. The participants spent the fourth day on a full-day fieldtrip in Matlab, a neighbouring district, to observe an ICDDR,B project and get a brief glimpse of rural Bangladesh. The nation-wide blockade that limited city tours and shopping outings was mercifully lifted on this last day of the seminar.

**Presentations**

The presentations were structured in eight sessions organized around the following issues: 1) *Born Unequal? Gender and Child Survival*; 2) *Engendering Health*; 3) *Seeking Safety: The Shadow of Sexual Violence*; 4) *Access to Education: Leveling the Playing Field*; 5) *Gender and Employment in the Globalizing World*; 6) *Creating Political Space*; 7) *Investing in Women’s Health: Policy Instruments*; 8) *Gendered Access: Challenges to Public Policy*.

Copies of papers, including those of presenters unable to reach Dhaka, were made available to all participants and observers. *(see CD with electronic copies of papers)*

**Concluding Session**

The concluding session, ‘Gendered Access: Challenges to Public Policy’ consisted of a panel of speakers comprising both policy makers, such as, representatives of the Planning Commission, Bangladesh and the World Bank, as well as practitioners such as Dr. Zafurullah Chowdhury of Gono Shasthyakendra who revolutionized peoples’ participation in accessing health services in Bangladesh, and Madhu Kishwar of Manushi who redefined access to livelihood and dignity of street vendors through legislation in India.

*Papers can be accessed by IUSSP members on the IUSSP website at:*
http://www.iussp.org/Activities/gender-index.php
Annex 1: List of papers submitted for the seminar.

- Sex Ratio in Relation to Fertility and Two-Child Norm in India
  (*Sayeed Unisa*)

- Does intra-household discrimination account for the bulk of India's 'missing women'? 
  (*Amaresh Dubey and Arjan Verschoor*)

- Short-term Morbidity in India: Gender Disparity in Access to Health Care
  (*Mitali Sen and Abhilasha Sharma*)

- The Stigma of Dark Skin in Bangladesh: Women's Mental Health and Access to Health Services
  (*Rifat Hasan*)

- Women at Mid-Age and Beyond: Menopause and its After-math: A Study of Pakistani Women's Health Needs
  (*Tahera Aftab*)

- Socio-Economic and Sexual Securities of Young Women Working in Garments Industry: A Case Study of Bangladesh
  (*M. E. Khan, Aditi Aeron, Richard Anker, U. Rob*)

- Judging Sex: Judicial Discourse, Law Reform and Access to Justice for Sexual Violence in India
  (*Oishik Sircar*)

- Family values or public access - levers for improving girls' schooling in rural Pakistan
  (*Christine Callum, Zeba Sarhar, Minhaj ul Haque*)

- Teacher absence as a factor in gender inequalities in primary school access in Pakistan
  (*Sharon Ghuman and Cynthia Lloyd*)

- Gender Inequalities in School Enrolment in Nepal: Examining Effects of Geographical Inaccessibility
  (*Shyam KC*)

- Changing Identities: Gender and Employment in the Call Center Industry in India
  (*Deepthi Shanker*)

- Gender Wage Gap in Urban India: An Econometric Analysis
  (*S. Madheswaran, Basudeb Guha Khasnobis*)

- Gender discrimination and returns to self employment: Evidence from rural India
  (*Klaus Deininger, Hari Nagarajan*)

- The Emerging Role of Women in Political Decision Making in South-Asia with special reference to India
  (*Pamela Singla*)

- Women's Political Participation and Local Governance: Gendered Constructions of the Political Space
  (*Stefanie Strulik*)

- Family Planning as an Investment in Development: Evaluation of a Program's Consequences in Matlab, Bangladesh
  (*Shareen Joshi and T. Paul Schultz*)

- Overcoming women's constraints to accessing health services: the role of the media
  (*Monica DasGupta and Nistha Sinha*)

- Structural Changes in the Economy and Issues in Women's Employment and Access to Resources in Nepal
  (*Meena Acharya*)

- Expiry of Multi Fiber Agreement and Gender Equity in Labour Market: A Study in India
  (*Indira Hirway*)
## Annex 2: List of Participants

**Gender and Access in South Asia**  
BIDS-IUSSP Seminar, Nov 15-18 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tayeba Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Prof. Nasreen Khondokar</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Maitreyi Das</td>
<td>Paper presenter</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Deepthi Shanker</td>
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<td>T. Paul Schultz</td>
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<td>Barbara Kafka</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Madhu Kishwar</td>
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<td>Zafrullah Chowdhury</td>
<td>Panelist</td>
<td>Gonoshasthya Kendra</td>
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### List of Observers

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<td>24</td>
<td>Ayesha Banu</td>
<td>Dhaka University</td>
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<td>Prof M. Kabir</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>Quazi Mesbahuddin</td>
<td>Planning Commission</td>
<td>Observer</td>
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Annex 3: Final programme.

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Day 1 November 15, 2006

9.00 Opening remarks
   Simeen Mahmud, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
   Sonalde Desai, University of Maryland, College Park, USA

9.30 Participant introduction

10.00-10.20 Break

10.20-12.00 Session 1 Born Unequal: Gender and Child Survival
   Moderator Sonalde Desai
   Sex Ratio in Relation to Fertility and Two-Child Norm in India
   Sayeed Unisa
   Discussion
   Does intra-household discrimination account for the bulk of India’s “missing women”?*
   Amaresh Dubey?and Arjan Verschoor
   Discussion
   Sum up by moderator

12.00-1.00 Lunch

1.00-3.30 Session 2 Access to Health
   Moderator Simeen Mahmud
   Short-term Morbidity in India: Gender Disparity in Access to Health Care
   Mitali Sen and Abhilasha Sharma
   Discussion
   The Stigma of Dark Skin in Bangladesh: Women’s Mental Health and Access to
   Health Services
   Rifat Hasan
   Discussion
Women at Mid-Age and Beyond: Menopause and its After-math: A Study of Pakistani Women’s Health Needs
Tahera Aftab
Discussion

Sum up by moderator

3.30-4.00 Break

4.00-5.00  Session 3 Seeking Safety: The Shadow of Sexual Violence
Moderator Simeen Mahmud

Socio-Economic and Sexual Securities of Young Women Working in Garments Industry: A Case Study of Bangladesh
M. E. Khan, Aditi Aeron, Richard Anker, U. Rob
Discussion

Day 2 November 16, 2006

9.00-10.45  Session 4 Access to Education: Levelling the Playing Field
Moderator Sayeed Unisa

Teacher absence as a factor in gender inequalities in primary school access in Pakistan
Sharon Ghuman and Cynthia Lloyd
Discussion

Gender Inequalities in School Enrolment in Nepal: Examining Effects of Geographical Inaccessibility
Shyam KC
Discussion

Sum up by moderator

10.45-11.15 Break

11.15-12.00  Session 5 Gender and Employment in a Globalizing World
Moderator Prof Nasreen Khundker

Paradox of two Bengals: Robust Growth with Low Women’s Employment Rates
Maitreyi Bordia Das
Discussion
12.00-1.00 Lunch

1.00-3.00 **Session 5 (contd)**

Changing Identities: Gender and Employment in the Call Center Industry in India
Deepthi Shanker
Discussion

Expiry of Multi Fiber Agreement and Gender Equity in Labour Market: A Study in India
Indira Hirway
Discussion

Sum up by moderator

3.00-3.30 Break

3.30-4.30 **Session 6 Creating Political Space**
Moderator Tahera Aftab

Women’s Political Participation and Local Governance: Gendered Constructions of the Political Space
Stefanie Strulik
Discussion

Sum up by moderator

6.30 Cultural Show

**Day 3 November 17, 2006**

9.00-11.00 **Session 7 Investing in Women’s Health: Policy Instruments**
Moderator Prof. Omar Rahman

Family Planning as an Investment in Development: Evaluation of a Program’s Consequences in Matlab, Bangladesh
Shareen Joshi and T. Paul Schultz
Discussion

Sum up by moderator

11.00 Break and video presentation “I have something to say”

1.00-2.00 Lunch
2.00-5.30  **Session 8 Gendered Access: Challenges to Public Policy**

Welcome from the BIDS Director General  Dr Quazi Shahabuddin
Seminar Highlights  Simeen Mahmud

Panel Moderator  Barbara Kafka, The World Bank
Panelists:
Quazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Member General Economics Division, Planning Commission
Zafrullah Chowdhury, Gano Shashthya Kendro
Madhu Kishwar, Editor, Manushi
Junaid Kamal Ahmad, The World Bank
Maitreyi Das, The World Bank

Open discussion
Vote of thanks  Sonalde Desai

7.00  Leave by bus for dinner on the boat at Ashulia

**Day 4 November 18, 2006**

Field trip to the ICDDR,B Field Hospital and Community Health Programme in Matlab (optional)