



MAKING ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGES WORK FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

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Asia finds itself in the midst of a global economic crisis that has already taken an unmentionable toll on the region's economy. As Asia's economy continues to unravel, the human cost of the crisis grows ever larger; this cost is being borne by those who can least afford it—the poor, the vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups, who are typically the first to lose their jobs and lack the safety nets necessary to weather economic difficulties.

The purpose of this paper is to review the gender implications of the economic crisis and to assess how ESPs can help mitigate their impact. While ESPs will not be able to provide the total solution, they represent immediate responses that can provide corrective measures to cushion against adverse human development impacts, depending on the proper targeting of sectors and population groups. ESPs generally aim at: (i) restoring macroeconomic stability, through job creation and support to the business sector; and (ii) cushioning the impact of the crisis on consumers in general, and vulnerable groups in particular. Since many of these ESPs have just been announced, there is ample room for gender advocates to ensure that the implementation arrangements for these packages are gender sensitive. While the size of these packages may be negligible, their potential impact in reducing the negative social implications on most affected groups of the population cannot be emphasized enough.

This paper is a contribution to the discussion on the gender dimensions of Economic Stimulus Packages, which will be taken up in the High-Level Conference on the Global Economic and Financial Crisis on 24-26 June 2009. It is in the process of review and comments are welcome.

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Introduction

1. Asia finds itself in the midst of a global economic crisis that has already taken an unmentionable toll on the region's economy. As Asia's economy continues to unravel, the human cost of the crisis grows ever larger; this cost is being borne by those who can least afford it—the poor, the vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups, who are typically the first to lose their jobs and lack the safety nets necessary to weather economic difficulties.

2. Governments around the world have acted swiftly to contain the human costs of the crisis, introducing economic stimulus packages (ESPs) that, among other things, are intended to generate employment, provide direct income support to low-income households, and increase spending on social services and human development. While all of these measures are ostensibly pro-poor, it raises the question of whether they are sensitive to the differential impact of the crisis on women and men. Previous economic crises have shown that the impact of economic upheavals are rarely ever gender-neutral, with women tending to bear the brunt of adjustment. ESPs must therefore take these differential impact into account: do they protect the welfare of women? Is their allocation of resources gender sensitive? Do they provide men and women with equal opportunities? Since many of these ESPs have just been announced, there is ample room for gender advocates to influence the finer details of, and implementation arrangements for, these packages.

3. The purpose of this paper is to review the gender implications of the economic crisis and to assess how ESPs can help mitigate their impact. While ESPs will not be able to provide the total solution, they represent immediate responses that can provide corrective measures to cushion against adverse human development impacts, depending on the proper targeting of sectors and population groups. ESPs generally aim at: (i) restoring macroeconomic stability, through job creation and support to the business sector; and (ii) cushioning the impact of the crisis on consumers in general, and vulnerable groups in particular. Since many of these ESPs have just been announced, there is ample room for gender advocates to ensure that the implementation arrangements for these packages are gender sensitive. While the size of these packages may be negligible, their potential impact in reducing the negative social implications on most affected groups of the population cannot be emphasized enough.

4. This paper is divided into five parts. Following this introduction, Section I provides an overview of the global economic crisis, and summarizes some of the possible impact of the crisis on women and gender equality. Section II provides an overview of ESPs, focusing on 10 Asian countries, analyses their features, and outlines the challenges of assessing their expected gender impacts. Section III recommends a number of policy measures and processes that could be adopted to make the ESPs more gender-sensitive,

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while Section IV identifies entry points at the regional and global level that could support the adoption and implementation of these policy measures. Section V concludes.

I. Overview of the Global Economic Crisis and its Potential Impact on Women and Gender Equality

A. The Global Economic Crisis: Transmission Channels and Impact on Asia

5. The speed with which the current economic crisis has crippled the global economy is staggering: what started out as a financial crisis in the US has now become one of the “deepest and most synchronized recession in our lifetimes (OECD 2009:5). Developing countries in Asia were largely spared in the beginning of the crisis, due to their limited exposure to the subprime markets as well as the general resilience of their financial sector—the pay-off of reforms adopted in response to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Eventually, however, the recession in developed countries made its way to the region through trade channels, causing both employment and aggregate demand to drop precipitously.

6. The UNESCAP (2009) estimates that a total of 24 million people in Asia are in danger of losing their jobs, with women and the youth showing greater vulnerability. IMF (2009a) projections likewise paint a bleak picture for the region in the short-term: economic output in newly-industrialized Asian economies is expected to contract by -5.6 percent in 2009, while developing Asian economies are expected to grow by 4.8 percent this year, a significant contraction from the 10.6 percent and 7.7 percent growth rates posted in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

7. More specifically, the global economic crisis is expected to affect the region’s economy through four major channels of impact: (i) falling exports and aggregate demand; (ii) reversals in domestic and foreign migration; (iii) tightened credit markets; and (iv) strained fiscal budgets.

Impact 1: Fall in exports, aggregate demand

8. Asia’s phenomenal growth in the last two decades has been largely due to strong demand for its exports in developed countries. Although intra-regional trade has grown remarkably in recent years, this growth has largely been driven by trade in parts and components, as more and more Asian countries have become integrated into vertically global supply chains. As such, the growth in Asian exports has remained highly correlated with aggregate demand developed countries, particularly the US and the EU (Kato, 2009).

9. With aggregate demand falling in developed countries as a result of the global economic crisis, Asia’s export position has weakened substantially. James, et al (2008) and Dejardin and Owens (2009) note that labor-intensive export products such as textiles and garments, footwear and leather products, toys and games, and more technology- and capital-intensive products such as electronics and auto parts have been severely affected. Other sectors such as construction, tourism, finance, services and real estate are also

expected to be hit by the crisis, and there are already indications that wage growth is slowing in the region (ESCAP, 2009).

Impact 2: Reversals in internal and foreign migration

10. Apart from export demand, the current global economic crisis has led to a decline in demand migrant labor, leading to massive reversals in internal and external migration. Millions of migrant workers are being forced to return home, as more and more companies face closure and bankruptcy, and as more and more countries tighten controls on immigration (Box 1).

Box 1: Tighter Immigration Controls

Faced with weakening job markets, many destination countries are tightening immigration controls. The United Kingdom has introduced a points-based system that favors high-skilled migrants over unskilled migrants. It has most recently raised the minimum educational and financial qualifications even for the high-skilled. Australia would reduce the intake of skilled migrants by 14 percent, from 133,500 to 115,000. In the United States, a provision of the stimulus package makes it more difficult for beneficiary firms to hire high-skilled foreign workers. Spain has introduced a “voluntary return” program for migrants. Italy plans to introduce tougher requirements for residency permits, requiring doctors to report undocumented patients, and authorizing citizens' patrols to pick up illegal immigrants. Developing host countries are also taking measures to reduce their intake of legal migrants. Malaysia cancelled work visas for 55,000 Bangladeshi workers in early March and is attempting to restrict the entry of new and returning workers. Russia announced in December that it would reduce work permits by half in 2009, from 4 million to 2 million.

Source: Ratha and Mohapatra, 2009.

11. The economic slowdown in the US will deal a huge blow to East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia, where remittances from the US account for 44 percent and 28 percent of their inflows, respectively (James, et al, 2008). The World Bank estimates that, in 2009, remittances will decrease in nominal dollar terms by 4.2-7.5 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, and by 4.2-7.3 percent in South Asia. These represent significant declines given the double-digit annual growth in remittances in previous years (Ratha and Mohapatra, 2009). Countries like the Philippines, where remittances account for roughly 10 percent GDP, will be hit the hardest (Box 2; James, et al, 2008).

Box 2. Top Recipients of Remittances in Asia

In 2007, three of the top four recipients of remittances were in Asia, respectively, India, PRC, and Philippines. Along with Mexico, these countries accounted for almost 30% of total world remittance inflows or 40% of remittances received by developing countries. Bangladesh and Pakistan were the other developing economies among the world's top 10 recipients.

In the Philippines, remittances make up about 10% of Philippine GDP. About 26% of overseas Filipino workers work in the G3 countries: 13% in Japan, 11% in US/Canada, and 3% in Europe. Remittances provide about 80% of income of receiving households in the country. A large part of these transfers goes toward food, education, house purchases and renovation, and acquiring land. Because of remittances, poverty incidence in the Philippines declined by 30% in 2003. A slowdown in these flows would lead to a higher incidence of poverty.

Source: James, et al, 2008

Impact 3: Tightened credit markets

12. The global financial crisis has had a relatively weak impact on the region's economy via the financial channel. Asian financial institutions remain fairly robust; however, there is a very real threat of liquidity shrinking and loanable funds drying up. It has been observed that both portfolio and foreign direct investments are also decreasing in the region: portfolio investment in some developing economies such as India; Malaysia; Philippines; Taipei, China; and Thailand turned into net capital outflows in the second quarter of 2008, while FDI has also begun to slow down in Hong Kong, China; Singapore; and Thailand. James et al (2008)

13. In countries like India, where trade makes up a smaller proportion of the economy, tighter credit conditions are more likely to be the major constraint to growth in the short-term (IMF, 2009a). These conditions will not only hurt firms who need external financing, but also households as they try to rebalance their savings and consumption patterns.

Impact 4: Strained fiscal budgets

14. Coming into 2008, countries such as Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Korea; and Taipei, China were enjoying fiscal surpluses and low public debt (James, et al, 2009); but this position is likely to be reversed as government budgets begin to face pressures from both the revenue and expenditure sides. Falling aggregate demand, coupled with measures to stimulate demand through tax cuts, will severely affect government budgets on the revenue side. Meanwhile, the implementation of fiscal stimulus measures will place a major strain on government budgets on the expenditure side. Developing countries in particular will need additional funding which may imply increasing the budget deficit and the size of the national debt. If developing countries are unable to mobilize the required resources to finance domestic stimulus policies, they may have to introduce procyclical policies that counter the positive impact on global growth of the stimulus policies in developed countries.¹ Countries like India which started out with very high fiscal deficits have very little room to maneuver, and this raises serious questions regarding the measures that will have to be taken in the medium term to balance the budget.

B. Gender Impacts of the Global Financial Crisis: Evidence from Literature

15. Experience with previous crises has shown us that economic meltdowns can lead to significant setbacks in the global fight against poverty and inequality, with serious implications on women. By dint of institutional barriers and cultural norms which define gendered outcomes, women have historically borne the brunt of economic adjustment during crises.

¹ Recommendations of the Commission of Experts of the President of the General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System. April 2009.

16. In the previous section, we highlighted four major impact of the crisis on the Asian economy; this same impact constitute the major channels of transmission that could affect women and families in Asia. Figure 1 provides a graphic summary of these channels combining women with families in light of the increased burden of unpaid work that women provide to families in response to loss of income and assets and the decline in public and private services caused by economic crises.

Loss of women's employment and rise in vulnerable employment as a result of falling aggregate demand and exports

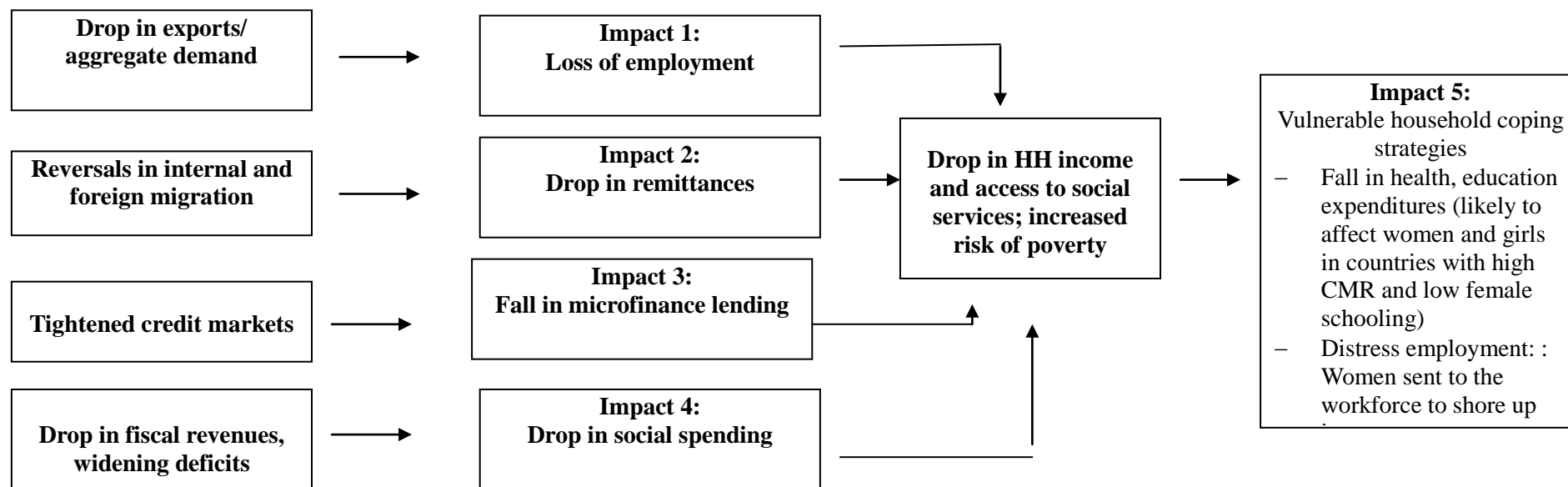
17. The fall in export demand described in the previous section is expected to disproportionately affect women workers, who make up the bulk of employment in export-oriented industries. In Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, women account for substantial percentages of total employment in garments, textiles and electronics, with a ratio of 2-5 female workers for every male worker (Dejardin and Owens, 2009)². Women account for more than half of the total workforce in electronics manufacturing in the Philippines, while they account for 78 and 85 percent of the total in garments manufacturing in Malaysia and Bangladesh, respectively (Newfarmer, 2009).

18. Apart from working in sectors that have been hit hard by the slump in export demand, women are also more likely to lose their jobs for other reasons. First, women constitute the majority of low-skilled, low-salaried, and temporary workers—part of the flexible workforce that can easily be discarded during economic downturns. Dejardin and Owens (2009) find that proportionately more women are employed as unskilled laborers in textiles and garments and footwear manufacturing in Thailand; electronics and auto parts in the Philippines; and all of the worst-hit export sectors in Vietnam (Table 1). Meanwhile, Carr and Chen (2004), note that women workers in vertically-integrated global production chains remain segregated and concentrated at the margins of the production process and account for less than 10 percent of the total sale price of what they produce.

19. Second, women are more likely to be laid-off because of the male bread-winner bias: male workers tend to be kept at work because they are considered the primary providers for their families (Elson, 2008, 2002; Fukuda-Parr, 2009). During the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, for instance, the South Korean government launched a campaign aimed at women to “get their husbands energized.” Not surprisingly, female labor force participation fell, female employment declined by 7.1 percent compared to 3.8 percent for males, and women’s paid work became increasingly informalized (Elson, 2008). This shift to informal employment likewise bodes ill for women, as this typically means taking on vulnerable employment as either casual workers, homeworkers or unpaid family workers (Carr and Chen, 2004). In Asia and the Pacific, about 65 percent of working women are already in vulnerable employment, mainly in the region's informal sector (IPS News, 2009).

² The findings are based on an analysis of the microdatasets of the 2005 (1st quarter) Labour Force Surveys of Thailand and the Philippines, and the 2004 Living Standards Measurement Survey of Vietnam.

FIGURE 1. GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS: FIRST AND SECOND ROUND IMPACTS ON WOMEN AND FAMILIES³



³ Adapted from Knowles, Pernia and Racelis, 1999; Newfarmer, 2009; and Sabarwal, Sinha and Buvinic, 2009.

TABLE 1. SHARE OF UNSKILLED WORKERS IN SELECTED EXPORT INDUSTRIES,
BY GENDER

Industry	Thailand (2005)			Philippines (2005)			Vietnam (2004)		
	% Unskilled			% Unskilled			% Unskilled		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Textiles	3.13	6.88	11.39	4.02	4.70	6.82	11.48	23.11	20.09
Garments	3.16	6.06	3.77	13.92	5.46	7.30	-	-	-
Electronics	5.74	4.06	5.20	7.57	8.99	8.53	11.63	21.51	16.64
Footwear, leather products	3.17	4.33	3.60	10.85	5.63	8.55	24.89	22.97	23.66
Auto (plants, parts)	10.92	3.40	4.99	3.28	10.62	4.35	25.44	30.02	26.02

Source: Dejardin and Owens (2009)

Drop in Remittances due to Reversals in Internal and External Migration

20. The reversals in internal and external migration can be expected to impact male and female migrant workers differently; job losses are likely to have a disproportionate impact on women migrants who are overrepresented in the informal, and low-skilled sectors of the economy (IOM 2009). Women migrants are typically found in traditionally “female” occupations—such as domestic work, care work, nursing, work in the domestic services and sex work— which are characterized by instability, low wages, dismal working conditions, and the lack of social services. During a crisis, women migrants in these sectors are at the greatest risk of being subjected to lay-offs or poorer working conditions, due not only to their weak bargaining positions, but also their ethnicity. There are anecdotal reports about migrant workers in Singapore and Malaysia being subjected to wage cuts, delays in wages, and reductions in the number of working days (Abella and Ducanes, 2009). A decrease in remittance flows is also likely to affect women who are often the main recipients of these flows. Dislocation and return could also mean the loss of independence gained by women migrants, which in turn would affect changes in gender roles that have been brought about by migration.

Fall in Microfinance Resources and Lending Due To Tighter Credit Markets

21. Although the squeeze in Asian credit markets has been relatively mild, it nonetheless poses a problem to microfinance resources and lending, particularly for microfinance institutions (MFIs) that source their financing from commercial sources (Sabarwal, Sinha and Buvinic, 2009). Many MFIs depend on financing from local and international banks. There are indications that they face more pressure today than MFIs that have built a deposit base.

22. Women make up the bulk of microfinance clients; in 2006, over 3,330 MFIs reached some 133 million clients, of which roughly 60% were women. (Newfarmer, 2009). There are indications that the credit squeeze could hurt microfinance lending in South Asia, which accounts for more than half of global demand for microfinance; in India, for instance about 500 commercial, regional and cooperative banks are indirectly involved in microfinance, including big domestic players such as the State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Yes Bank, and global players such Standard Chartered Bank and

HSBC. Faced with tighter credit markets and higher costs of funds, these commercial institutions may choose to scale back lending to microfinance, staunching the flow of much-needed loans to South Asian women (Financial Chronicle, 2009), who rely on these loans to start up small, home-based enterprises, or augment income to fund their children's education and health needs (International Trade Center, 2009).

Drop in Social Spending due to Widening Fiscal Deficits

23. Social spending and safety nets will be critical to augment falling household incomes, which typically impose greater adjustment costs for women and children. Cuts in such spending will hurt women and girls disproportionately, and potentially lead to massive reversals in gains made in gender-related MDG targets. Sabarwal, Sinha and Buvinic (2009), for example, cite estimates which warn that, as a result of the global economic crisis, child deaths in 59 developing countries will reach 1.7 million births, majority of which will be of girl children. The authors also highlight the burden this is likely to place on women and maternal health, and enrollment rates for girls. During the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, for instance, falling incomes led to drops in secondary school enrollment rates which were higher for girls in several affected countries. In the Philippines, drop out rates were also higher for girls in the higher elementary grades (Knowles, Pernia and Racelis, 1999).

Household Coping Strategies

24. As household incomes fall, and credit and social services become less accessible, households will cope with the adverse effects of the crisis by increasing their work effort, adjusting their consumption and saving patterns, or changing their utilization of social services (Knowles, Pernia and Racelis, 1999). Experience with previous crises reveals that these different coping strategies would have a number of important gender implications:

- In Indonesia during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the number of women leaving the labor force was exceeded by the number of women entering it as self-employed or unpaid family workers; in this way, women are typically forced to seek "distress employment," characterized by underemployment or informal employment, to augment falling household incomes (Dejardin and Owens, 2009).
- In the Philippines, housewives responded to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis by reducing consumption, eating only two meals a day in order to feed their children three meals. Poor households pulled out children from school and reduced their utilization of health care services, resorting instead to herbal remedies, indigenous health practitioners, or self-medication (Knowles, Pernia and Racelis, 1999). Previous crises affecting low income countries have also shown that girls in poor countries with low pre-existing female schooling are highly vulnerable to being withdrawn from school to cope with declining income (Sabarwal, Sinha and Buvinic, 2009).

25. As consumption of marketed goods and utilization of public services fell, households turned to women's unpaid work as substitutes. This included, among others, food production, food preparation, fuel and water collection, and home-based health

care (Elson 2008, 2002; Fukuda-Parr 2009). Unpaid work acts as a constraint on women's options for paid work, and for those who manage to have the latter, greater unpaid work significantly increases the double burden of women who also have paid work (Box 3).

Box 3. Increase in Women's Unpaid Work

Detailed studies of survey data in both Indonesia and the Philippines show that as men became unemployed, the amount of work done by women increased, as women took up the role of provider of last resort. For Indonesia, relevant data is available from the Indonesia Family Life Surveys, which covered more than 30,000 people in 1997/early 1998 and a follow up survey of a 25 per cent sample in late 1998. Using this source, Frankenberg, Thomas and Beegle (1999) calculate the percentage of the labour force employed in paid work in 1997 and 1998 and show that for men it decreased by 1.3 percent, while for women it increased by 1 per cent. When unpaid work is also included, there is an increase for both men and women, but for men the increase is only 1.3 percent, while for women it is 7 percent. A nationally representative survey conducted by the Indonesian statistical office sixteen months after the onset of the crisis reveals the household coping strategies underlying these figures - especially increasing the labour market participation of older married women with children and producing more goods for home consumption (de la Rocha, 2000).

In the case of the Philippines, data from the Labor Force Survey shows that both male and female unemployment rates rose between 1997 and 1998: for men from 7.5 percent to 9.5 percent and for women from 8.5 percent to 9.9 percent (Lim 2000). However, mean weekly work hours for those employed moved in opposite directions for men and women, with those of men falling while those of women rose. Among the factors that may explain the increase for women is an increase in the hours of work undertaken by home based women working on subcontract (Ofreneo, Lim and Gula, 1999). This increase in the average hours that women spend in paid work has occurred in a context in which women typically spend almost 8 hours a day on housekeeping and child care compared about 2 and a half hours for men (UNDP, 1997).

Source: Elson 2002.

II. Rapid Gender Assessment of the Economic Stimulus Packages

A. The Economic Stimulus Packages: General Features and Observed Flaws

General Features

26. As of April 2009, the IMF estimates that stimulus packages in G20 countries will amount to 2.0 percent of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)-weighted GDP in 2009 and from 1.3 percent to 1.5 percent of GDP in 2010. In developed countries that initially bore the brunt of the financial crisis, immediate steps were taken to restore financial stability by easing monetary policy and providing liquidity and recapitalization, through financial stimulus efforts such as bank injections and loan guarantees. However, as it became increasingly apparent that these interventions would not suffice, and as the crisis quickly tore its way to the real economy, countries began to turn to fiscal policy to mitigate the impacts of the crisis. The fiscal stimulus packages which have emerged feature a mix of interventions aimed at (i) restoring macroeconomic stability, through job creation and support to the business sector; and (ii) cushioning the impact of the crisis on consumers in general, and vulnerable groups in particular.

Observed Flaws

27. Although countries have been quick to put in place economic stimulus measures, there are uncertainties regarding these packages that affect the extent to which they are able to address gender concerns. In its assessment of more than 40 ESPs in developed and developing countries, the ILO (2009a) has observed a number of factors that make an assessment of the ESPs difficult and challenging. First, the breakdown of rescue efforts in terms of old spending (already in the pipeline) and new spending is unclear. Second, the time-horizon in which the stimulus package will be implemented has not been well-defined. Third, in many cases, countries have announced fiscal rescue packages different from their financial rescue packages, but there is a tendency to count in financial help to different sectors (like loan guarantees) as part of the package. Lastly, stimulus spending announced by many countries are embedded in their annual budgets, which makes it difficult to identify the size of spending allocated to stimulate the economy.

28. Most of the ESPs that have been announced also reflect a number of fundamental weaknesses. For the most part, the transmission mechanisms through which the crisis is affecting individual economies have not been fully assessed in order to provide a basis for a more directed response. Most stimulus packages lack coherence to tackle the structural imbalances that lie behind the crisis (Japan's case is an exception), and could be misaligned in terms of its cross-sectoral impacts. For instance, unless the supply capacity of business is taken into account, increased infrastructure spending could lead to higher prices of goods rather than increased production. Tax cuts may induce higher savings rather than consumption. Global protectionist pressures may inhibit business expansion.

B. Economic Stimulus Packages in Selected Asian Countries

29. Almost all of the major economies in Asia have announced ESPs to mitigate the negative impacts of the global economic crisis. These ESPs reflect a great deal of variation both in terms of the size of the stimulus involved, as well as the measures included in the stimulus. For instance, the newly industrialized economies (NIEs) — Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, given their small domestic markets and heavy reliance on exports, have directed their stimulus responses to firms to keep them competitive. India's stimulus package is also primarily directed at supporting business, with significant tax exemptions and holidays for firms. Table 2 provides an overview of the ESPs announced by the governments of 13 Asian countries --- Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, People's Republic of China (PRC), Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taipei China, Thailand.

30. Across all countries, public spending on goods and services make up the bulk of fiscal measures, primarily directed toward infrastructure investments and public works spending to shore up employment and address the immediate impacts of job loss. Japan, Korea and PRC have likewise announced "green recovery" packages to promote environmental protection and energy efficiency as part of their ESPs. China and Thailand have also announced measures to increase home availability for poor households.

31. To complement public spending on goods and services aimed at creating

employment, many ESPs likewise include fiscal stimulus measures aimed at firms. In the more developed countries, these measures have taken the form of subsidies, tax rebates, and capitalization extended to corporations and leading industries; in countries like Japan, incentives are also being provided to firms which implement employment measures such as by hiring temporary workers as regular employees, or hiring workers who have been unemployed for more than six months. In developing countries, on the other hand, fiscal support to firms is largely directed at shoring up export- and labor-intensive industries, as well as small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

32. Fiscal stimulus measures aimed at consumers feature elements of social protection, and are intended to augment falling income and consumption as a result of the crisis. PRC, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, have announced increases in social transfers aimed at poor and low income households. Social transfers include direct cash transfers, conditional cash transfers, and social welfare programmes. Of note here would be differences in the type of measures announced in developed and developing countries. In the former, tax cuts and housing assistance for low and middle-income households are the main policy instrument used. In the latter, more direct and targeted measures are prominent, such as cash transfers or subsidies to the poor, particularly in rural areas. Apart from these targeted social protection measures, countries such as Korea, Malaysia, PRC, the Philippines, and Thailand have also announced new spending on basic social services such as health, education, and basic sanitation. All of these initiatives suggest a greater emphasis on providing some form of social floor that would cushion the impact of the crisis on the poor and the vulnerable.

People's Republic of China

33. PRC, has announced one of the largest stimulus packages, at 6.9 percent of its GDP in 2008—an amount which the government budget can comfortably afford, given PRC's budget surplus and low level of public sector debt. PRC's stimulus package is one of the most comprehensive in terms of the measures adopted, featuring a clear mix of pump priming efforts, and initiatives to cushion the poor from the impact of the crisis. The bulk of the spending is allocated for infrastructure projects, particularly in transport and power; reconstruction efforts related to the May 2008 earthquake; and increased spending on health and education. Support to firms will be provided largely in the form of reductions in the tax burden. Measures to protect the welfare of the poor are centered on boosting rural incomes, through increases in the minimum purchase price of grain, as well greater subsidies for farmers. The ESP also provides for greater social-security benefits for low-income groups (Chang Hee Lee, 2009). Box 4 summarizes the salient features of PRC's stimulus package.

Box 4 . PRC's Fiscal Stimulus Package: Salient Features

Housing: Building more affordable and low-rent housing and speeding the clearing of slums. A pilot program would be instituted to rebuild rural housing. Migrants would be encouraged to settle down through incentive programs.

Rural infrastructure: Speeding up rural infrastructure construction. Improvement of roads and power grids in the countryside. Increasing the use of methane. Ensuring the purity of drinking water. Expediting the North-South water diversion project. Reinforcing deteriorating reservoirs. Increased water conservation in large-scale irrigation areas. Increased spending on poverty relief.

Transportation: Accelerating the expansion of railways including building a larger number of dedicated passenger rail links and coal routes. Increased airport construction in China's western regions. Upgrading of urban power grids. Building more subway lines and roads.

Health and education: Greater spending on health care services in rural areas. Increased spending on education and more construction of junior high schools in rural areas in central and western China. Increased construction of special education and cultural facilities.

Environment: Improving environmental protection by enhancing the construction of sewage and waste treatment facilities and preventing water pollution in key areas. Accelerating greenbelt and natural forest planting programs. Increasing support for energy conservation and pollution-control projects.

Industry: Enhancing innovation and industrial restructuring and supporting the development of the high-tech and service industries. Disaster rebuilding: Speeding reconstruction in the areas hit by the May 12 earthquake in Sichuan Province.

Incomes: Raise average incomes in rural and urban areas. Raising 2009 minimum grain purchases and farm subsidies. Increasing subsidies for low-income urban residents. Increasing the number of pension funds for company employees and allowances for those receiving special services.

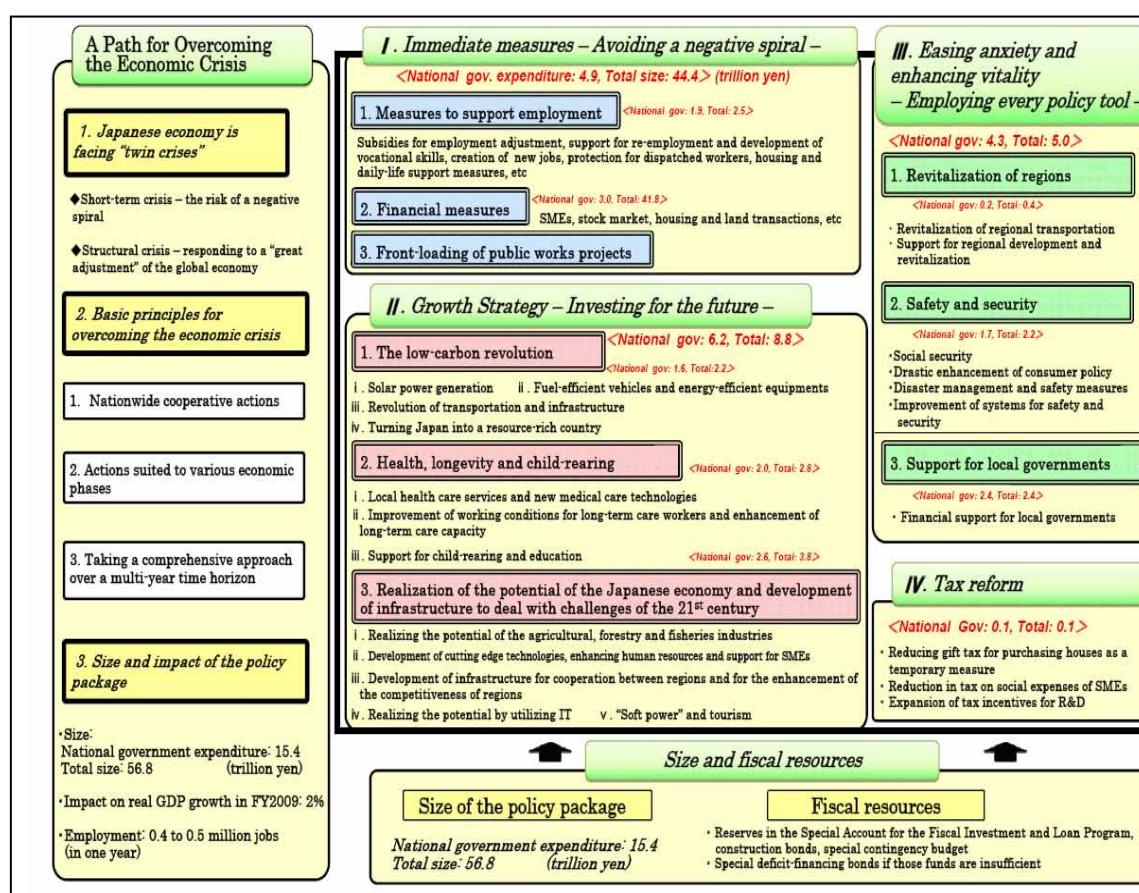
Taxes: Extended reforms in the value-added tax rules to all industries, which could cut the tax corporate burden by 120 billion yuan (about 17.6 billion U.S. dollars) and allow all companies in China to deduct spending on capital equipment. Technological upgrades will be encouraged.

Source: Chang Hee Lee (2009)

Japan

34. Japan has so far announced three ESPs, now amounting to 56.8 trillion yen. Like other ESPs in the region, Japan's package focuses on front-loading public works projects, creating employment and supporting businesses; the package also has a very strong social protection component. Japan's ESP is noteworthy in that it takes a more long-term view of the crisis and its implications; as such, the package not only contains measures aimed at achieving economic recovery within the next three years, but also a comprehensive policy package aimed at "investing for the future," i.e., addressing structural issues and bottlenecks over a multi-year horizon (Government of Japan, 2009). The main features of Japan's ESP are summarized in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: JAPAN'S ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE



Source: Government of Japan, 2009

India

35. India came into 2008 with a growing fiscal deficit. This notwithstanding, the government has announced two fiscal packages amounting to US\$ 4 billion, or less than one percent of its GDP for 2008. The package is mainly targeted at supporting businesses, with tax exemptions and holidays for SMEs, and \$70 million in incentives to boost exports of labor intensive commodities like textiles and handicrafts. Meanwhile, to support consumers, the value added tax has been cut at different levels and across products, and lending rates on housing loans for low and middle income segments have been reduced.

The Republic of Korea

36. The Republic of Korea has earmarked \$10.8 billion, or 1.1% of GDP, for its ESP, with 4 trillion won going to infrastructure; one trillion won to increased spending for medical services to low-income earners and additional local government spending; another trillion won to social transfers to low-income households; 3 trillion won in tax breaks for investment in factories; and 3.4 trillion won in assistance to small business (ILO 2009b)

Singapore

37. Singapore has announced a Resilience Package totaling \$20.5 billion with five components: creating jobs for Singaporeans, stimulating bank lending, enhancing business cash flow and competitiveness, supporting families and investments to build future capacity. To help Singaporeans stay employed, Government will spend \$5.1 billion in introducing the jobs credit scheme, providing income supplements, enhancing skills program and expanding recruitment across the public sector. Stimulating bank lending will be done through enhancing existing bank lending schemes, and introducing a risk-sharing initiative (including for trade financing). To support business cash-flow and strengthen Singapore's competitiveness, the Government will spend \$2.6 billion through tax concessions. About 13% of the stimulus package will be spent to provide additional support for families and communities during this downturn through direct assistance for Singaporean households, increased targeted help for vulnerable groups, and additional support for charitable giving and the community. Finally, to build a "home for the future", the Government will spend \$4.4 billion to develop Singapore as a global-city and best-home for Singaporeans by bringing forward infrastructure projects, rejuvenating public housing estates, and upgrading education and health infrastructure (Singapore Government, 2009).

Taiwan

38. Taiwan has announced an ESP amounting to Taiwanese dollars 180 billion or US \$5.6 billion, aimed at stimulating industrial growth and infrastructure development and promoting consumer spending. The ESP builds on previous government efforts to provide financial incentives for business, increase exports, and introduce tax breaks. The ESP has allotted around 58.3 billion Taiwanese dollars in infrastructure development; 20.5 billion Taiwanese dollars in financial incentives for SMEs; 37.5 billion Taiwanese dollars in tax holidays for new investments; and 1.5 billion Taiwanese dollars for export promotion to boost exports to new overseas markets such as Russia, Brazil and Middle East. Around 37.5 billion Taiwanese dollars will be provided as five year tax breaks on investments made by technical service and manufacturing companies. Some 1.81 billion Taiwanese dollars will be provided in form of interest subsidies to homebuyers, as part of a preferential mortgage program worth 200 billion Taiwanese dollars. A further 13.5 billion Taiwanese dollars will be provided as subsidies for low income households.

Indonesia

39. The global economic downturn has impacted Indonesia's growth to a lesser extent than other East Asian economies, such as Thailand whose economy is vulnerable to the external market. Nonetheless, the global downturn will continue to slow Indonesia's growth and limit gains on social indicators, particularly poverty reduction. Indonesia's ESP is aimed at strengthening consumers' purchasing power and keeping business competitive. The bulk of Indonesia's ESP amounting to US\$6.3 billion, or 1.3 percent of its GDP in 2008 will be in the form of tax cuts to low- and middle income workers having a monthly income of less than Rp 5 million, as well as reductions in corporate and value-added taxes. About 17 percent has been allocated to infrastructure and empowerment projects in the rural areas such as building roads and irrigation schemes. The package also includes diesel subsidy and discounted electricity rates for industries.

Malaysia

40. Malaysia announced its first ESP in November 2008, with an allocation of Ringgit (MYR) 7 billion. The first ESP was aimed at promoting housing and infrastructure development, supporting businesses, and strengthening social protection. To promote housing development, around MYR 1.2 billion has been allocated for construction of 25,000 homes for low and medium income groups. Infrastructure development is being supported through reductions in import duties on iron and steel products and cement, as well as the provision of benefits to industries that set up in the construction sector. The ESP also included measures to promote entrepreneurial credit facilities. To support income earners, employees' contribution to the provident fund has been reduced from 11 percent to 8 percent of income. Assuming universal participation of all provident fund beneficiaries, this move is expected increase consumption expenditure by MYR 4.8 billion. The ESP also set the basis for improvements in the distribution of welfare handouts and the complete registration of welfare recipients, based on revised eligibility criteria (Prime Minister's Department Malaysia, 2008).

41. In March 2009, the Malaysian Government announced a second ESP amounting to MYR 60 Billion. About half of this package has been allocated to assist the private sector affected by the crisis through guarantee schemes; and one third has been allotted to investments in key strategic sectors such as telecommunications, technology, tourism, agriculture, and life sciences (Prime Minister's Department Malaysia, 2009). About 16% has been earmarked for support to consumers and vulnerable groups, through investments in basic social services, food subsidies, welfare benefits for the poor and vulnerable; and the remainder has been allocated to reducing unemployment and increasing employment opportunities through training & job placement in public & private sectors, further tax deductions for retrenched workers, and creating job opportunities in the public sector.

The Philippines

42. The World Bank has assessed the Philippines as one of the countries in East Asia to remain resilient notwithstanding the impacts of the economic crisis. Economic growth however is expected to slowdown in 2009 from a high of 7.2% in 2007 to 4% in 2008, and a further decline to 3% in 2009. The employment sector has manifested signs of tightening and remittances from overseas employment are expected to be substantially reduced. The impact on the banking sector has been marginal.

43. Although the Philippines has not been directly affected by the financial crisis, the Philippine government has announced an Economic Resiliency Package worth PHP 300 billion or roughly 4% of GDP, to be spent on creating jobs, infrastructure investment, schools and hospital building, conditional cash transfers and tax exemptions (ILO, 2009a). A key component of this ESP is the Comprehensive Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (CLEEP), targeted mainly at mitigating the employment impact of the crisis on the poor, returning expatriates, workers in the export industry, and out-of-school youths. The Philippine government has increased funding for the CLEEP to PHP10 billion pesos in 2009. Of this amount, PHP 1 billion has been allocated to create 220,000 jobs in support of infrastructure, rural enterprise, public health care and food security (Philippine Office of the President, 2009). Around PHP 30 billion has also been earmarked for increased social insurance benefits to cushion the effects of lay-offs

and wage cuts. A conditional cash transfer (CCT), a program has also been put in place that provides modest food, health and educational subsidies to the poorest of the poor in return for sending their children to school, attending health centers, and having regular prenatal and postnatal care for mothers.

Thailand

44. The global economic crisis has affected Thailand principally through its export sector which is the main engine for economic growth. An additional one million contract workers is estimated to lose their jobs due to the contraction in the manufacturing, construction and tourism sectors, which will likely increase poverty (The World Bank, 2009). Thailand's economic stimulus package of \$3.33 billion was thus largely crafted along the lines of social protection although measures to support real-estate, tourism, and medium and small enterprises are likewise included.

45. Under the ESP, nine million low-income earners will be entitled to a monthly allowance of Baht 2000 per individual for about 9 million low-income earners nationwide. The assistance will be provided to all eligible members of Thailand's Social Security Fund. In addition, electricity and water will be made available to small households free of cost. The government has devised new mortgage insurance schemes to motivate low-income earners to buy homes, and new home buyers will have their tax deduction increased from Baht 100,000 to 200,000. Meanwhile, to boost tourism and service industries, Baht 500 million will be extended in the form of easy loans. There are also separate programs for promoting community-based enterprises, services to the elderly, retraining the workforce and support to community-based workers.

Bangladesh

46. In April 2009, Bangladesh announced a 'stimulus package' of Tk 3,424 crore, of which Tk 1,500 crore will go to additional farm subsidies; Tk 600 crore will go the power sector; Tk 500 crore will be channeled to the agricultural loan recapitalization facility and Tk 374 crore will be used to endow social safety nets. Tk 450 crore will be used to support export sectors, with the government raising cash incentives for jute and jute goods, leather and leather goods, and frozen foods (VOA News, 2009).

Sri Lanka

47. In December 2008, Sri Lanka announced a stimulus package valued at 16 billion rupees, (\$141 million) or 0.3% of GDP. The package includes cuts in energy prices and incentives for exporters. A 5% incentive payment on revenues will be provided to exporters in certain sectors (tea, apparel, leather, rubber, among others) who maintain 2008 revenues and do not retrench workers (UNESCAP, 2009).

Pakistan

48. Pakistan's huge fiscal deficit has prevented the government from introducing new fiscal spending. However, there have been efforts to reprioritize expenditures in 2008/09, to increase spending on social safety nets. The government has launched the Benazir Income Support Program, with a budget of PRs 34 billion (0.3 percent of GDP), to help poor families through monthly cash benefits. The government also plans to expand social safety net spending by an additional 0.3 percent of GDP, for which further external assistance (mainly grants) is being sought from donors (UNESCAP, 2009; Nassir, 2009).

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF SELECTED FISCAL STIMULUS PACKAGES IN ASIA

	Size	I. Public Spending on Goods and Services	II. Fiscal Stimulus Aimed at Consumers	III. Fiscal Stimulus Aimed at Firms
China	\$689 billion; 6.9% of GDP	Rural infrastructure construction; expansion of railways; airport construction in western province; upgrading power grids, greater spending on health and education in rural areas; construction of sanitation facilities.	Low-rent housing (0.28 trillion RMB), raising minimum grain purchases and farm subsidies; subsidies for low-income residents; increasing the number of pension funds; greater social security for low-income groups	Direct tax cuts for 9 industries (steel, telecommunications, automotive, etc.) support and development of high-tech and services industries, removal of loan quotas on commercial lenders
Japan	56.8 trillion yen	Funds to local government to invest in infrastructure projects, accelerated introduction of energy-saving technologies;	Aid to unemployed workers, housing assistance, unemployment insurance extension, cash transfer regardless of income	Tax incentives for energy saving technologies; increase wage subsidies for SMEs employers; increase subsidies for employers who hire temporary workers as regulars, inject funds into domestic banks who assist small and medium-sized industries.
India	\$4 billion; 0.3% of GDP	\$4.0 billion new spending on road, ports and infrastructure	Cuts in value-added tax; reduced lending rates for housing for middle and low-income groups	\$70 M in incentives to help exporters and labor-intensive industries (textiles and handicrafts), cuts in excise duty
Republic of Korea	\$10.8 billion. 1.1% of GDP	Infrastructure (4 trillion won), increased spending for medical services to low-income earners; additional local government spending (1 trillion won)	Social transfers to low-income household (1 trillion won)	Tax breaks for investment in factories (3 trillion won); assistance to small business (3.4 trillion won)
Taiwan	\$5.6 billion	58.3 billion Taiwanese dollars in infrastructure development	Interest subsidies to homebuyers; subsidies for low income households.	Financial incentives for SMEs; tax holidays for new investments; export promotion
Singapore	\$20.5 billion	Infrastructure spending to develop	Jobs credit scheme, income	Tax concessions to support business

	Size	I. Public Spending on Goods and Services	II. Fiscal Stimulus Aimed at Consumers	III. Fiscal Stimulus Aimed at Firms
		Singapore as a global city, rejuvenating public housing estates, upgrading health and insurance; expanding recruitment in the public sector	supplements, skills enhancement programs, direct assistance to households, increased targeted help for vulnerable groups	cash flow.
Malaysia	MYR 67 billion	Rural infrastructure investment: housing, schools, and hospital buildings; investments in basic social services; investments in key strategic sectors, i.e., telecommunications, technology, tourism, agriculture, and life sciences	Decrease in the contributions to the Provident Fund: tax deductions for retrenched workers; food subsidies, welfare benefits for the poor and vulnerable; home construction for low- and middle-income groups	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 to private firms
Philippines	PHP 300 billion; 4% of GDP	Investments in infrastructure, rural enterprise, public health care and food security programs, schools and hospital building; increased allocation for social insurance to cushion the effects of lay-offs and wage cuts.	Conditional cash transfer to provide food, health, and educational subsidy to the poorest of the poor; capacity building for unemployed, comprehensive livelihood and emergency employment program,	Tax exemptions
Indonesia	\$.3 Billion, 1.3% of GDP	Infrastructure spending through central and local governments for roads and irrigation	Tax cuts to low-and middle-income workers; direct cash transfer programs, rice for the poor, school assistance program.	Reductions in corporate and value-added tax; diesel subsidy and discounted electricity rates for industries.
Thailand	THB 300 billion; 3.3% of GDP	Housing and rural infrastructure development; increased spending on health	Cost of living alleviation projects and sustenance allowance; free education program; capacity building for the unemployed	Sector specific industry promotion, especially for tourism and service industries; easy loans for business enterprises.
Sri Lanka	16 billion rupees, (\$141 million),			Cuts in energy prices and incentives for exporters. A 5% incentive payment on revenues will be provided to exporters in certain sectors (tea,

	Size	I. Public Spending on Goods and Services	II. Fiscal Stimulus Aimed at Consumers	III. Fiscal Stimulus Aimed at Firms
	0.3% of GDP			apparel, leather, rubber, among others) who maintain 2008 revenues and do not retrench workers
Bangladesh	Tk 3,424 crore		Tk 374 crore to endow social safety nets	Tk 1,500 crore for additional farm subsidies; Tk 600 crore for the power sector; Tk 500 crore for the agricultural loan recapitalization facility; and Tk 450 crore to support export sectors, including higher cash incentives for jute and jute goods, leather and leather goods, and frozen foods
Pakistan	Pakistan's huge fiscal deficit has prevented the government from introducing new fiscal spending. However, there have been efforts to reprioritize expenditures in 2008/09, to increase spending on social safety nets. The government has launched the Benazir Income Support Program, with a budget of PRs 34 billion (0.3 percent of GDP), to help poor families through monthly cash benefits.			

Source: ILO, 2009a and b; Economy Watch 2009, various official and media sources

C. ESPs and Gender Dimensions

49. The emerging configuration of ESPs indicates a conscious effort to avoid the same setbacks in human development as previous crises. However, while many of the ESP's measures are ostensibly pro-poor, it is not immediately apparent whether they address the differential impacts of the crisis on women and men. With most ESPs still evolving, there is ample room for shaping their content to be responsive to gender impacts.

50. There are some discernible features of ESPs that augur well for women. On the upside, new spending on basic social services such as health, education, and basic sanitation—like those announced in Korea, Malaysia, PRC, the Philippines, and Thailand—represent investments that would not only allow the poor continued access to essential services, but also reduce the pressure on women to take on unpaid work (Fukuda-Parr, 2009). Fiscal support to firms in export- and labor-intensive industries and SMEs could help mitigate job losses among women, who make up the majority of workers in these sectors. Likewise, targeted fiscal support to consumers in the form of cash transfers or subsidies could cushion the impact of the crisis on the poor and the vulnerable, including women. The same is true with social protection schemes. Much would depend on how the targets are identified and informed, and how resources are ultimately allocated to gender-responsive measures. The targeting of women as beneficiaries is critical in view of evidence that suggests that programs which tackle both life-cycle and work-related vulnerabilities, such as the burden of childcare, lead to more sustainable social benefits.

51. However, there are also some areas of fiscal spending where opportunities reside to make them more responsive for women. For most ESPs, the bulk of fiscal spending is directed to infrastructure and public works, which in many countries tend to support jobs for men. However, in some packages these expenditures specifically include local roads, hospitals and clinics, water and sanitation facilities, rural education facilities, and other services which are likely to benefit women by providing greater access to service jobs, as well as improving their access to the services themselves. Within the category of support to firms many countries have targeted support to small and medium enterprises and export industries, including the textile industry (e.g., in China and India), in which women largely predominate, as well as assistance to poor farmers, many of whom are women. All of this makes it important for gender advocates at the national level to unpack the elements of these packages and see the resources allocated to each.

D. Short and Long-Term Issues

52. While most of the economic stimulus packages which have been announced actually increase spending on social services and safety nets in the immediate future, there is the question of whether these pro-poor spending initiatives will be sustained in the medium- and long-term. Future efforts to balance the budget and stabilize the macroeconomy could very well lead to a contraction on social spending, as has been observed in previous financial crises (Fukuda-Parr 2009).

53. For the most part, the urgency of having ESPs immediately in place might have resulted in a short-sighted view of its potential to contribute to long-term development goals. Many governments perceive the ESPs as a temporary solution to the crisis, rather

than as an instrument that could catalyze broader and more lasting policy reforms. While measures supported by ESPs are aimed at short-term objectives, many of these measures are likely to have medium-term, if not long-term, consequences.

54. The beneficial impacts of increased spending on social services and protection for women can be reversed if these programs are discontinued after the crisis. Ortiz (2009), for instance, highlights how Asian countries squandered a singular opportunity to institutionalize social protection schemes that were introduced in response to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis; a decade after the crisis, social protection schemes had faded into the background, as the large amount of funds spent on temporary social protection schemes did not leave any system in place.

III. Engendering ESPs: Policies and Processes

A. The Importance of a Two-Pronged Approach

55. The ESPs provide a window of opportunity for fiscal spending to mitigate the impact of the crisis on gender outcomes. Engendering ESPs would require focus on two equally important dimensions: (i) the inclusion of gender-sensitive policies and measures; and (ii) the participatory processes that engage women in the design, financing, and implementation of ESP measures. Moreover, experience with the 1997 Asian financial crisis provides important lessons and insights that could be useful in shaping ESP policies, including its gender implications. This breadth of experience creates an opportunity for the affected countries to benefit by learning what works and what does not work (Box 5).

56. As earlier noted, measures included in ESPs are largely of two kinds: (i) those aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability, through job creation and support to the business sector; and (ii) those aimed at cushioning the impact of the crisis on consumers in general, and vulnerable groups in particular. In the past, policymakers have focused on gender issues mainly through the second set of measures --- these are the gender-sensitive measures prominent in social protection schemes and in the health and education sectors. However, this approach limits the opportunity to mainstream gender in a more systematic way across other ESP components. For one, mainstreaming gender in sectors such as infrastructure is particularly important since experience with previous crises have shown that, in countries where social protection schemes are weak or non-existent to begin with, public works programmes can be an effective way of providing social assistance, since they tend to reach the poor and vulnerable through self-targeting.

Box 5. Lessons from the Asian Financial Crisis

The experience with the 1997 Asian financial crisis provides important insights for facing up with the present one.

The Asian crisis underscored the importance of providing social safety nets to cushion against the weakening capacity of families to sustain their members. Many of the safety nets that were provided however were temporary and came too late. An important lesson that emerged is that assistance needs to be channeled not necessarily to those who are most affected by the crisis but to those who are least able to cope with its adverse impacts. Countries like Korea, Taipei, China and Thailand which expanded their safety nets did a better job of protecting vulnerable groups than countries like Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, which relied mainly on traditional values of self-reliance and family networks (ILO, 2009b).

The impact of government subsidies and cash transfers was highly dispersed, in the absence of systems and procedures for targeting assistance to vulnerable groups. The lack of targeting mechanisms allowed the middle-income and upper-income groups to also benefit from the subsidies which did little to promote equity.

The strain on government budgets greatly affected the provision of public services, causing deterioration in quality of public health and education systems. This was compounded by the shift from private to public sector providers, with the demise of many private sector entities. Government programs for health and education led to an over-reliance on supply-side subsidies, when what is needed is a shift to demand-side subsidies (vouchers, health insurance) that empower poor consumers to choose freely between government, private and NGO providers.

The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis exposed critical gaps in monitoring systems which made it more difficult to rapidly implement programs tailored to specific crisis-generated needs. It also highlighted the importance of participatory research techniques, and local level or community-based monitoring systems, which allow individual communities to undertake their own poverty assessments and help empower them to deal with poverty-related issues using their own resources.

Sources: ASEAN, 2001; Knowles, Pernia and Racelis, 1999; Ortiz, 2009

B. Policies to Engender the ESPs

Creating Jobs and Supporting the Business Sector

57. Gender-sensitive approaches can be incorporated in measures to create jobs and support the business sector in a number of ways. **First, spending on infrastructure and public works, which make up the bulk of the ESPs, can be directed to benefit both male and female workers.** In Asia, India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) could serve as an example of how gender can be incorporated in public works projects. Enacted in 2005, the NREGA is a demand-driven scheme which guarantees employment in rural areas for 100 days in a year. Priority is given to labor-intensive projects, and laborers are paid the prevailing rate of minimum wages in the state. The NREGA mandates that at least one third of the workers should be women, and that crèche facilities should be provided to support women with children. The

crèche facilities also relieve girls from the burden of having to take care of younger siblings while their mothers are at work. As of 2008, the share of women beneficiaries was 40 percent at the national level (Jaffer, 2008). On the whole, job creation projects should also include employment targets for women (Elson, 2008).

58. **Second, equal access to employment opportunities could be enhanced by expanding the concept of “public works” to include employment-intensive social infrastructure projects and service delivery.** These would include projects such as auxiliary health care, care for the elderly, childcare, early childhood development, and youth development activities --- components which would attract and employ women, as well as lessen the burden of unpaid work on women (Dejardin and Owens 2009, and Elson 2008). Vigilance should be exercised to ensure that public spending on such interventions is at least maintained at current levels, if not increased. ESPs should be able to provide a perfect opportunity to make overdue budget increases for education and health, particularly in countries which continue to fall short of meeting their MDGs (ADB, 2009).

59. **Third, stimulus measures aimed at firms could target sectors where women make up a good proportion of the labor force, such as export manufacturing.** Incentives could be provided to firms which implement affirmative action, employment measures that protect or create employment for women, or place women in higher levels of responsibility.

60. **Fourth, adequate support should be provided to training and enterprise development, to provide women with the skills necessary for them to seize livelihood opportunities,** access the formal labor market, and take advantage of the growth in demand that will come with economic recovery.

Protecting Consumers and Vulnerable Groups

61.. **Any new or increased spending on social protection schemes should be directed towards reaching women in the informal sector, and supporting female migrant workers who have been displaced.** Informal community-based mechanisms such as social funds and microinsurance schemes have been known to work in the past and should be encouraged. The ILO’s experience with its Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty (STEP) global program should prove instructive in this regard, as would national programs such as India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association, Bangladesh’s Grameen Kalyan, and the Philippines’ Social Health Network and Empowerment. Options such as establishing welfare funds—which are financed mainly from a tax on a manufacturing activity or product—should also be considered to protect workers in informal sector manufacturing activities (Box 6; Luttrell and Moser, 2004)

62. **Social protection mechanisms could be linked to training and enterprise development, to ensure that social protection contributes to growth.** A good example would be the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which supports household food security through a monthly wheat ration, while providing assistance in enterprise development through training and credit over a longer timeframe. The program targets widows or abandoned female-households, among others (Luttrell and Moser 2004). As highlighted in a recent panel hosted by the International

Trade Center, governments have to recognize the often-untapped potential of women-led small businesses. Supporting MFIs will be a critical intervention in this regard, and governments may want to consider MFIs as channels for development funding or cash transfers to the poor.

Box 6. Informal Social Protection Mechanisms

The Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India is a demand-driven organization which has worked on ways in which informal social protection mechanisms can be recognized and formalized. It works primarily in microfinance but, having identified a strong need for social insurance, has established a health insurance scheme whereby the security of the organization (women trusting each other) was the collateral offered to the government and the insurance industry (Lund and Srinivas, 2000: 108). SEWA has exclusively female membership, and combines a consideration of gender, life cycle and household status with an understanding of the regulatory system by, for example, offering free maternity benefits to women who subscribe to a fixed deposit plan. SEWA has designed a payment of premiums to suit different income groups among the poor, which allows for monthly and annual repayments which is an effort to create adaptable systems. It was initially targeted at urban women but now coverage has extended to rural areas; by decentralizing, it is hoping to attract more rural women as members. Grameen Kalyan in Bangladesh targets rural groups of informal workers through health insurance, and emphasizes family planning, maternal and child health, and reproductive health. It therefore has more impact on women. SHINE (Social Health Network and Empowerment, Philippines) tries to include flexibility by means of a 'patchwork approach' to target different groups by integrating grassroots organization and cooperatives with public social security, linked to the public health case systems (Sabates-Wheeler and Kabeer, 2003:42).

Welfare funds place a levy on consumption or export of the products. There are two fundamental requirements for setting up a successful welfare fund. First is the existence of an association based on trust. Second, administrative and management capability to collect contributions and provide benefits.

Welfare Funds must provide the following benefits at a minimum:

- Specific health benefits, related to the nature of the home-based work, including maternity benefits;
- Scholarships for children to go to school;
- Old-age pension;
- Life insurance; and
- Child care facilities.

Source: Luttrell and Moser, 2004

63. **Stimulus measures aimed at consumers, particularly cash transfers, subsidies and relief work schemes targeted to the poor and vulnerable, should consider the differential needs of women and provide mechanisms for reaching women who are most vulnerable.** These direct interventions should be backed by a solid analysis of who and where the poor are, taking gender differences into account (IFAD, 2008). Eligibility criteria for these interventions should include gender dimensions to ensure that women benefit. The option to provide conditional cash transfers should also be considered (Box 7).

Box 7. Conditional Cash Transfers

Conditional cash transfer programs have been regarded as an effective way to reconcile safety nets—or more generally social assistance policies—with investments in human development benefiting the poor. Simply handing over cash to poor families will not be sufficient to tackle poverty in the long run. Hence, the idea is to transfer cash to the poor “on condition” that the poor will commit to empower themselves and help bring future generations of poor families out of poverty.

The best known and most rigorously evaluated is the Mexican program, *Oportunidades* (formerly *Progresa*), now widely replicated in Latin America. Designed to break the cycle of transmitting poverty from one generation to the next, a cash transfer is paid to mothers conditional on the school attendance of their children, connecting with the health services, and on the mothers contributing certain hours of work in the local community. The program is widely praised for having achieved improved school attendance, putting the importance of girls' education on the policy agenda, and improving women's self-esteem.

While conditional cash transfers are designed to help reduce poverty in the long run, they can also be used to step up assistance to poor people during times of crisis. For example, Mexico was able to tackle the welfare effects of the food crisis of 2008 through a one-time top-up payment to *Oportunidades* participants. In Indonesia, the *Jaring Pengamanan Sosial* program reduced school drop-out rates among beneficiaries during the 1998 financial crisis. CCT programs in Colombia and Turkey have been successful in improving enrollment rates, particularly at the secondary level.

Source: Hyun H. Son, 2008

ESPs as a Vehicle for Far-Reaching Reforms

64. **While the ESPs are basically short-term responses to the crisis, it provides an opportunity to engender the macroeconomic framework⁴,** and institute policies that are more attuned to issues of redistribution, social justice and equity. Ortiz (2009) argues that ESPs should bring redistribution to the policy agenda as it is an effective means to boost economic growth by increasing demand, enhancing human capital (through health and education), and promoting stability. Without this framework for the ESPs, decisions will just be a series of quick-fixes. Most of the ESPs reviewed in this paper lack such a framework, with the possible exception of Japan, and to a certain extent Malaysia and Singapore.

65. **ESPs could potentially set the stage for more far-reaching changes in the macroeconomic policy and expenditure frameworks, to ensure that gender outcomes are achieved, and women’s potential contributions to economic recovery and future growth are fully harnessed.** In terms of government spending, the design and features of these ESPs must account for the impact of increased spending on the medium-term expenditure framework, inasmuch as efforts to balance the budget in the

⁴ Gender advocates could examine the work that has been done in this area by the International Working Group on Gender, Macroeconomics and International Economics (GEM- IWG).⁴

future could entail cuts in social key development spending and the removal of critical social protection schemes that were put in place during the crisis. Minimizing expenditure cutbacks in infrastructure, education, and health programs are important since these are critical to long-term growth and social stability (ADB, 2009). Measures to sustain improvements in women's income are likewise critical, as the means for providing for the needs of their children and communities.

C. Measures to Promote Gender-Sensitive Processes

66. Experience with gender mainstreaming has highlighted a number of critical variables for integrating gender dimensions in national development strategies. These include: (i) institutionalization of the process of participation of gender advocates in all phases of planning; (ii) a systemic approach that links development policies and priorities, including for gender, with programming and budgeting, and monitoring for results; and (iii) establishing clear lines of responsibilities and accountabilities for all national players, including members of parliament and civil society organizations.

67. Engendering ESPs will require the same set of variables, but with a difference under the present circumstances: speed and careful targeting will be essential, and so will the monitoring of hidden costs. Transparency and social inclusiveness in decision-making are also key elements that should guide the delivery processes and monitoring systems to ensure accountability and gender equity.

68. A clear strategy for engendering the ESP policies and processes must be put in place immediately to create a space for women's voices to be heard addressing in the impacts of the crisis. A lesson from the 1997 financial crisis was that women missed the opportunity to participate in the social dialogues in the labor markets because collective bargaining was dominated by male leaders even in female-intensive industries (Dejardin and Owens 2009). In the fiscal sector, weak capacities in mainstreaming gender in plans and budgets hampered the effectiveness of response measures. These experiences should provide the basis for improvements that could be put in place to make ESPs work for women.

69. As ESPs take shape, gender advocates should consider the following elements in the design of strategies to engender outcomes of ESPs.

- **Create spaces for women's voices to be heard in designing ESP measures.** Build coalitions or create a community of gender champions in the legislature, as well as in the ministries of planning and finance; establish mechanisms for participation and accountability, to ensure that policymakers and government officials are held to account for the gender outcomes of ESPs.
- **Champion the principles and tools of gender responsive budgets (GRBs), to ensure that ESP resource allocations respond to the needs of women who are most impacted by the crisis.**
- Ensure that ESPs delivery is complemented by adequate transparency and monitoring systems to ensure accountability.
- **Engage civil society organizations, gender advocates and experts who can provide the expertise and evidence base to help in targeting women beneficiaries and in monitoring results.** Strengthen national and subnational monitoring systems (especially at the community level) to

support gender-disaggregated analysis to look beyond “averages,” identify pockets of poverty and vulnerability, and support targeting mechanisms for direct transfers; include the monitoring of hidden costs to women of ESP measures.

- **Develop and implement an advocacy campaign at both the national and international levels and build an advocacy network to ensure that information is shared and exchanged rapidly.** An important first step is to identify gaps in the knowledge and commitment of key decision makers: are they aware of the gender impact of the crisis and the measures that could be taken to address this impact? How much importance do they attach to address the same?; engage with private sector partners⁵ with expertise to undertake research and communicate with a diverse audience on the roles of women.
- **Engage in affirmative action for increased spending on the education of girls, and jobs targeted for women, especially in government sponsored programs to insulate them from additional burdens resulting from the economic downturn, as evidence from the past crises have shown them to be more vulnerable than men**

IV. Engendering ESPs: Regional and Global Entry Points

70. While national ESPs will remain the primary and most direct way of addressing the domestic impacts of the crisis, calls for a more coordinated response at the regional and global levels have been mounting, and with good reason. First, national economic stimulus packages are expected to have spillover effects that will affect other countries through trade and finance channels (OECD, 2009). For instance, measures which overtly or inadvertently increase protectionism in developed countries, whether in trade in goods or services, will have enormous implications on developing countries which rely on exports and foreign migration for growth. The presence of such spillovers or externalities drives a wedge between the costs and benefits of national ESPs; addressing the implications of this asymmetry can only be achieved through coordinated action.

71. Second, the national coffers of developing countries are unlikely to be sufficient to finance adequate ESPs in the short-term, and assist them to restructure their economies in the medium- to long-term. Regional responses will therefore be necessary to ensure that multilateral institutions and donor countries provide adequate assistance to developing countries that are paying the price of a crisis they did not bring about. The Commission of Experts of the President of the General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System⁶ has identified a number of financing sources for this purpose, including IMF and World Bank financing, regional sources of

⁵ Ernst and Young, McKinsey & Co. and Goldman Sachs have all been involved in research on the role of women in corporations and the economy at large; McKinsey and Co. in particular, has been very active in promoting women’s role in business and the economy, through its Leadership Project, its partnerships with groups such as the Women’s Forum, and its sponsorship of women’s events all over the world. Apart from providing much-needed expertise, such a coalition would also be a formidable ally in advocacy efforts.

⁶ The Commission was headed by Dr. Joseph Stiglitz, economics professor at Columbia University and Nobel Prize awardee for economics. The report is referred to also as the Stiglitz Commission Report.

liquidity such as the Chiang Mai Initiative in Asia, and a possible Global Stimulus Fund, to be financed partially out of developed countries' own ESPs. The Commission has proposed that developed countries dedicate at least one percent of their ESPs to support the recovery of developing countries, in addition to augmenting their ODA commitments. Despite the crisis, or perhaps even more so, donors should deliver on their commitments to improve the quantity and quality of aid, and continue efforts to reform the international aid architecture.

72. A concrete effort to craft a coordinated response to the crisis will be the establishment of a regional monitoring system on the gender impact of the crisis. The regional monitoring system could provide a unifying framework that would lay down a common assessment methodology and set of indicators, to allow connectivity with national monitoring systems. This common set of indicators could be supplemented by country-specific sets to reflect national concerns (Statistical Commission and Economic Commission for Europe 2000). In the short-term, the regional monitoring system would primarily help ensure that information on the gender impacts of the current crisis is shared and exchanged rapidly with gender advocates and policymakers. But in the medium- to long-term, the system could become a formal and institutionalized mechanism that would perform regular surveillance functions, as well as assess the longitudinal gender impact of economic crises.

73. The regional monitoring system should build on ongoing initiatives by multilateral institutions and donors at both the national and community levels. The ILO has set up a webpage⁷ dedicated to monitoring the impact of the crisis on employment, with national employment data disaggregated by gender to a certain extent. CIDA's ongoing research project to assess the poverty impact of the crisis using community-based monitoring systems⁸ would also be a good source of data. UNESCAP has a website⁹ dedicated to track the region's progress in the MDGs; this could in fact serve as a good model for implementing a regional monitoring system involving several donors, as the website is being maintained under the tripartite regional project of UNESCAP, UNDP and ADB.

V. Conclusions

74. Experience with previous crises has shown us that economic meltdowns can lead to significant setbacks in the global fight against poverty and inequality, with serious implications on women. By dint of institutional barriers and cultural norms which define gendered outcomes, women have historically borne the brunt of economic adjustment during crises. The current crisis has already started to take its toll on women workers, who make up a huge part of the flexible workforce that can easily be discarded during economic downturns. Reversals in internal and external migration are also having a disproportionate impact on women migrants, who constitute the majority of low-skilled, low-salaried, and temporary workers. These impacts—together with falling microfinance lending and a possible decline in social spending due to widening fiscal deficits—can have disastrous results on gender outcomes.

⁷ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/financialcrisis/>

⁸ The project covers Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Vietnam.

⁹ <http://www.mdgasiapacific.org/>

75. On the whole, the design of policy responses to cope with the current global crisis in developing countries should invest in putting money in women's hands in poor households because of its large development payoffs – both in terms of mitigating current hardships and preventing future ones. Expanding economic opportunities for poor women should be a core theme of public works and other safety nets, and financial sector operations. In particular, micro-finance institutions should be capitalized so that they continue to offer credit and other financial services to poor borrowers, the majority of whom are women (Sabarwal, Sinha, Buvinic, 2009).

76. The economic stimulus packages (ESPs) which have been introduced in different countries makes use of fiscal spending to mitigate this gendered impact. As most ESPs are still evolving, their impacts on gender are not immediately apparent. Gender advocates should see this as an opportunity to incorporate gender-sensitive policies, tools and processes in the design and implementation of ESPs. From both evidence and experience in the past crisis, there are a number of useful insights that can inform and guide advocacy work.

77. Social safety nets should be the minimum response to cushion the impacts of the crisis on the weakening capacity of families to sustain their members. The provision of social safety nets should be immediate as any delay can cause severe and irreversible social consequences. The targeting of beneficiaries is crucial; the Asian crisis has taught the lesson that assistance need not be necessarily channeled to those severely affected, but to those who are least able to cope with economic downturn.

78. The prominence of gender-sensitive issues should not be confined to social protection schemes (health and education); this approach limits the opportunity to mainstream gender across other ESP components. This is particularly important since experience with previous crises have shown that, in countries where social protection schemes are weak or non-existent to begin with, public works programmes can be an effective way of providing social assistance, since they tend to reach the poor and vulnerable through self-targeting.

79. Equal access to employment opportunities could be enhanced by expanding the concept of “public works” to include employment-intensive social infrastructure projects and service delivery. These would include projects such as auxiliary health care, care for the elderly, childcare, early childhood development, and youth development activities --- components which would attract and employ women, as well as lessen the burden of unpaid work on women.

80. Stimulus measures aimed at firms could target sectors where women make up a good proportion of the labor force, such as export manufacturing. Incentives could be provided to firms which implement affirmative action, employment measures that protect or create employment for women, or place women in higher levels of responsibility. Adequate support should be provided to training and enterprise development, to provide women with the skills necessary for them to seize livelihood opportunities, access the formal labor market, and take advantage of the growth in demand that will come with economic recovery.

81. While ESPs are intended primarily to provide short-term responses to the crisis, they can also provide the opportunity to engender the macroeconomic framework and

institute policies that are more attuned to issues of redistribution, social justice and equity.

82. Viewed as a development instrument, rather than a short-term response to the crisis, ESPs could potentially set the stage for more far-reaching changes in the macroeconomic policy and expenditure frameworks, to ensure that gender outcomes are achieved, and women's potential contributions to economic recovery and future growth are fully harnessed. In terms of government spending, the design and features of these ESPs must account for the impact of increased spending on the medium-term expenditure framework, insofar as efforts to balance the budget in the future could entail cuts in social key development spending and the removal of critical social protection schemes that were put in place during the crisis. Minimizing expenditure cutbacks in infrastructure, education, and health programs are important since these are critical to long-term growth and social stability.

83. Engendering ESPs will require speed and careful targeting will be essential, and so will the monitoring of hidden costs. A clear strategy for engendering the ESP policies and processes must be put in place immediately to create a space for women's voices to be heard addressing in the impact of the crisis, champion the tools and principles of gender responsive budgets, and engage civil society organizations, gender advocates and experts who can provide the expertise and evidence base to help in targeting women beneficiaries and in monitoring results.

84. The current crisis represents a singular opportunity to question and overhaul the macroeconomic framework that governs fiscal, monetary, trade, and tax policy. As such, efforts to engender ESPs should not only look at influencing short-term responses to mitigate the impact of the crisis. Gender advocates should make a case for ESPs as a development instrument that could potentially set the stage for instituting policies that are more attuned to issues of redistribution, social justice and equality.

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