



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

WORKING PAPER:

**WOMEN, GENDER AND WORK
IN NANGGROE ACEH DARUSSALAM PROVINCE**

by:

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Abstract:

This working paper intends to inform the international development community in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province and abroad on the obstacles and constraints that Acehnese women encounter in engaging in decent work. Decent work is defined as productive work which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection and in which rights are protected. Findings are based on interviews, observations, meetings, discussion forums and programme implementation as well as on a number of documents produced by international organizations, civil society, research institutes and government. The author would like to reiterate that the paper is open for discussion and invites readers to contribute.

Statistics demonstrate a low labour force participation rate for Acehnese women. This is to a large extent due to social discourse which discourages women's participation in productive work. Social norms prescribe that women take care of their families and keep moral and religious values. By engaging in work outside the house these responsibilities could be endangered. Subsequently, most Acehnese employers do not provide workers with facilities or arrangements to balance work and family responsibilities. This, in its turn could discourage women to engage in productive work.

These views have an impact on women's unemployment rate which is higher than men's. Reasons for this are the horizontal and vertical labour market segregation which prevents women from engaging in non-traditional jobs and from reaching higher positions in the work place. Several issues can be defined that contribute to the continuation of this labour market segregation and high unemployment rates: discriminatory employment practices before, during and after recruitment, lack of market-responsive skills amongst women, low access to information, lack of business management skills, low access to finance and low capacity for self-organization.

The author argues that the international development community could play a key role in promoting gender equality in NAD Province. With regards to women's economic empowerment this would concern the promotion of child care facilities, innovative credit schemes that are accessible without collateral, non-stereotypical vocational skills and business training, sensitization of employers on the elimination

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of discriminatory employment practices, creative ways of information spreading and capacity building for self-organization of women workers. While women are thus negotiating their space in the economic spectrum, men will need to be included in this process of change and need to redefine their position.

BACKGROUND

1. An armed conflict of almost thirty years affected the majority of women in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) Province. Some women fought in the frontlines while many others took responsibility for those family members who were left behind and provided them (and combating husbands who came back every few months) with food, clothing and money (World Bank, 2006).² It is estimated that around 23% of women took up the task as head of household during the conflict period (Marzalan Kamis and Saiful Mahdi, 2006). Acehnese women thereby contributed greatly, though often in ways invisible to the public, to sustaining their families and communities. They did this under harsh circumstances in which high levels of gender based violence prevailed (IRC, 2006 and Save the Children, 2006).

2. Already practiced unofficially, Syari'ah law in Aceh received official recognition by the Indonesian Government in 2002. This law strengthened the role of Ulama³ to determine and influence matters relating to religious, cultural and educational affairs (Muhammed Yasir Yusuf, 2006). This had great implications on women's lives depending on how the law was interpreted at local level. Reports mention the introduction of curfews for women, sweeping women when wearing "inappropriate" clothing and cutting hair if women did not cover their heads (Lily Zakiyah Munir, 2003).

3. After almost 30 years of conflict, hope for a peaceful future was within eye sight in mid- 2004. A changed political leadership in Indonesia and a militarily-weakened Free Aceh Movement (GAM) took tentative steps towards resuming dialogue and ending the long conflict. It was however only after a major earthquake and tsunami struck the Acehnese coast and Nias that the peace process gained momentum. Involving women's views and rights only to a certain extent in the drafting process, a Peace Agreement was signed on 15 August 2005 in Helsinki. In the implementation of the agreement, women's involvement was invisible which in its turn subjected them to interventions that did not acknowledge their contribution to sustainable peace nor encouraged equal rights, benefits and opportunities for women.⁴

4. The earthquake and tsunami killed an estimated 167,000 people of whom the majority were women (Oxfam, 2005).⁵ It was estimated that between 110,000 and 120,000 families were displaced. Poverty levels increased considerably and pushed

² Approximately 4% of armed GAM returnees are women of whom the majority under 25 years of age and around 1.4% of political prisoners are women (World Bank, 2006).

³ Ulama are Muslim scholars engaged in the several fields of Islamic studies. They are best known as the arbiters of Shariy'ah (Islamic law).

⁴ Reported by a gender consultant on gender, peace and conflict that was hired by one of the international agencies in NAD Province.

⁵ In some villages it was reported that up to 80% of deaths were female (Oxfam, 2005). However, due to the conflict period, men are still in the minority in NAD Province by around 55,000. This difference is pronounced in the age group of 25-34 where men are 34,000 less than in this age group for women.

an additional 325,000 people in NAD Province below the poverty line.⁶ The tsunami also had immense effects on men and women's livelihoods. Around 4,700 coastal fishing boats were lost, 20,000 ha of fish ponds were destroyed, 60,000 ha of agricultural land damaged, and 100,000 small businesses were destroyed. This left an estimated 600,000 persons in Aceh and Nias (about one-fourth of the total working population) without a job (BRR and International Partners, 2005 and ILO, 2006a).

5. Under these difficult circumstances, women responded greatly to the need to lift their families out of poverty by entering into the labour force. With increased care responsibilities,⁷ many of them still managed to find some form of employment, mostly in jobs with little upward mobility and small profit margins. These findings were supported by 2000 and 2005 Provincial Bureau of Statistics (BPS) population census data which show a high decrease in the percentage of unpaid workers⁸ (of which 80% are women) whereas a high increase was shown in numbers of self-employed women workers. This most likely indicates that after the Tsunami, many women formerly working in unpaid work became self-employed workers. These findings demonstrated that women's position in the labour market is negotiable and changeable over time and in particular circumstances.

LOW PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

6. Active labour force participation can be seen as a means for women to empower themselves to fully realize their human rights and potential as human beings. However, in some cases women may not perceive their engagement in productive work as empowering but more as an inevitable necessity. For these women, other means could be explored to exercise their human rights and capabilities. Employment should therefore be promoted for those women who see it as a way to empower themselves. Moreover, women's employment should be defined in terms of decent work: productive work which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection and in which rights are protected.

7. The total working population of Aceh is estimated at around 2.7 million out of which 1.8 million persons are in the labour force. The situation of Acehnese men and women with regards to their position in and access to the labour market is very different. BPS statistics expose a clear picture of women's difficulties in accessing the labour force and more so, their difficulties in engaging in decent work.⁹ BPS 2005 statistics show a low participation rate for women in the labour force. Overall, only around 50% of all women of working age participate in the labour force. In

⁶ Also, the Tsunami caused an estimated loss of US\$1.2 billion and reduced GDP by 5% (BRR and International Partners, 2005).

⁷ In a survey conducted by UNORC (2006) 37% of IDP host families mentioned to face economic difficulties as a consequence of hosting IDP's. Although no inquiry was made about overburdening host families' women with household and care tasks, it can be assumed that next to financial difficulties, women in particular are overburdened with care responsibilities.

⁸ Unpaid work is understood as work that is non-reproductive. Domestic chores and child care are therefore not included in unpaid work. Examples of unpaid work are agricultural work or shop assistant.

⁹ Decent work is defined as productive work which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection and in which rights are protected.

comparison, 81% of all men of working age participate in the labour force.¹⁰ For women as well as for men, rates of labour force participation increase with each age group up to the age group of 55. However, for men, labour force participation increases much more than for women whose participation only increases with a few percentage points. The biggest difference between men's and women's participation rates exists in the age group 25-55 where the difference is almost 36%: about 96% of men are participating in the labour force in comparison to 60% of women.¹¹

8. Besides this, it is remarkable that participation rates for women decrease sharply with the increase of educational level from 66% labour force participation for women without schooling to 39% for women who completed junior high school. This trend, however, is reversed from secondary high school to university levels where the labour force participation rate of women increases again. In fact, of all women in the working age, those educated in university, are most likely to be participating in the labour force. Their labour force participation rate is 76%. The high levels of labour force participation amongst non- or low schooled women might be related to higher poverty levels for those with lower educational background which pushes women into the labour market.

EXPECTATIONS ON FEMININITY IN ACEH SOCIETY

9. The great differences between men and women in labour force participation rates can to a large extent be explained by looking at expectations on femininity and discourses on women's roles and position in society. Documents from Dinas Syari'ah Islam¹², the Institute of Islamic studies and other government institutions such as Biro Pemberdayaan Perempuan (BPP)¹³ expose a clear picture of these discourses and expectations. Discourse on women's roles and position understands femininity in Aceh as mainly centering around the family and reproduction. Although some movement is currently taking place in discussing and redefining gender equality and Acehese women's position by civil society organizations, the angle from which these issues are usually discussed, is from women as reproductive actors. The more visible attempts in doing that, are mainly made by the BPP which tries to redefine and revalue women's position in the family without touching men's position as leaders of the family. Women are encouraged to fight stereotypes but should not "forget their role as determined by God as women". Equality is understood as complementarity between husbands and wives in which their respective responsibilities should be given the same value. This equal value does not have consequences though for decision-making in the household where husbands will keep "the right to lead their wives and to fulfill their wives biological, sociological, psychological and economic rights." Also, no questions arise where it concerns the position of the husband as main provider of finances for the household. It is stressed that men have to lead with respect and should not limit the freedom of choice for their wives. This discourse is promoted by government as the Islamic way of interpreting gender equality. Generally, in Aceh, the concept of 'gender equality' is frowned upon as it is highly connected to western values. These values are

¹⁰ Persons between 15 and 65 years old are considered of working age.

¹¹ Labour force participation is measured by the proportion of all men and women working or seeking / available for work as a part of all men and women in the working age.

¹² Department for Shyari'ah Islam.

¹³ Bureau for Women's Empowerment.

subsequently summarized as 'free for all action' (Raihan Putry Ali Muhammad, 2001).

10. The views expressed in BPP's publications to a large extent reflect prevalent ideas and expectations on femininity in Acehese society. It is generally believed that men's and women's responsibilities and tasks are different but should be equally valued. Men in any case, are the heads of household even if their wives could perform better than them in providing guidance and leadership. Also, it is perceived as essential for women to keep the morals and honour of the family and to take care of her husband and children and educate them.

DISCOURAGING WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN PRODUCTIVE WORK

11. From discussions, publications and discussion papers from government and universities, it seems that women are highly discouraged to participate in the labour force. Basically, two streams of thought can be identified on women and work in NAD Province: one that discourages women to take up work that is not considered proper or 'female' and one that discourages women to work outside the house. Documents from Dinas Syari'ah Islam¹⁴, the Institute of Islamic studies and other government institutions such as Biro Pemberdayaan Perempuan (BPP)¹⁵ drift between these two directions. These streams of thought are vested in the aforementioned discourses and expectations of femininity in Aceh.

12. The first stream of thought that discourages women's work in non-female occupations is vested in the discourse wherein women are perceived as essential for keeping moral/ religious values and the honour of the family. Generally, therefore, women are understood as human beings who are to be protected from influences from an outside world which could spoil their honour and value system. Exposure to these negative influences could take place while engaging in work outside the house and in particular while engaging in work that is not associated with women's reproductive role. Protection is normally provided by a husband, and for unmarried women, by the father and brothers. Unmarried women and widows are generally perceived to be more vulnerable to outside influences since they are not (yet) under the guidance of a husband. As a referral book for female teenagers, published by BPP, mentions: "The attention for, and empowerment of female teenagers has to be great, remembering their important and determining role in this life." Young girls between 10 and 19 years of age living under Syari'ah law in NAD province are advised to "restrain from the impact of foreign culture and to maintain an obedient character in life" (Raihan Putry Ali Muhammad, 2004). This type of advice, in particular where it is connected to women's expected devotedness to household chores, affects their freedom of movement and freedom of choice to practice their capabilities which may not lie in the traditional domain of women's responsibilities. This restriction is further being fed by local interpretations and implementation of rules in Syari'ah law. As reported by one of the international agencies, in some places in Aceh, women have an evening curfew which clearly challenges women's freedom of movement.

¹⁴ Department for Shyari'ah Islam.

¹⁵ Bureau for Women's Empowerment.

13. The second stream of thought that discourages women from engaging in productive work outside the house, centres around women's role as care givers. It is the perception that women who work outside the house, cannot take care of their husband and children. From a young age, women and girls are socialized with the idea that the family is their most important place. In one of BPP's publications it is mentioned that "for teenage girls, friendships with other teenagers should exist by the notion that the family is the key to success in this life." (Raihan Putry Ali Muhammad, 2004). Since husbands are considered head of the household, women need to ask them for permission to work outside the house. Husbands are likely to discourage their wives to work outside the house if not necessary for financial reasons. This is in particular true if there are children in the household. The home is seen as the safest place for women and their children. Reports with qualitative data on domestic violence however do not support this notion (IRC, 2006).

14. Because of the notion on women as the principal care takers of the family and men as the principal breadwinners for the family, very few employers provide their workers with facilities or arrangements to balance family and work responsibilities. Community care-services and institutionalised care provisions are almost non-existent. This in itself could discourage women to become part of the labour force and engage in productive work outside the house.

15. The discouragement of women's participation in the labour force is exposed in the BPS 2005 statistics where different answers are provided for men's and women's status as either 'actively seeking work' or 'being available for work'. Women mention more often to be available for work whereas men mention more often to seek work. It is likely that this pattern in response is the result of socially acceptable answers: it might be more accepted for men than for women to answer that they actively seek work. The pattern could imply that women do have a wish to participate actively in the labour force but express this wish in a different manner.

WOMEN'S UNEMPLOYMENT RATES AND LABOUR MARKET SEGREGATION

16. As indicated by the BPS statistics, women are less likely to participate in the labour force than men. However, when women do wish to participate in the labour force, they are likely to suffer from low access to employment opportunities. BPS 2005 data show that women from all age groups who wish to engage in work activities are 7 percentage points more likely to be unemployed than men even though in absolute numbers women are in a minority in the labour force.¹⁶ This is particularly true for those who have completed Junior High School and Secondary High School. Although it is very difficult to find work for both women and men with these educational backgrounds, male unemployment reaches only 15% whereas women's unemployment reaches 30% even when in absolute numbers they make up for the minority in the labour force. It should also be noted that enrollment rates in all levels of schooling are lower for women than for men, except for university where enrollment rates are almost equal for men and women (Lailisma Sofiyati, 2005 and

¹⁶ Labour force participation is measured by the proportion of all men and women working or seeking/available for work as a part of all men and women in the working age. Unemployment is measured by the proportion of men and women seeking/available for work as a part of the total number of men and women in the labour force.

ILO, 2006b).¹⁷ However, even women with a university background face a 5% higher unemployment rate than men.

17. High unemployment rates for women is likely to correlate with the high level of vertical and horizontal labour market segregation (low mobility to higher levels of the labour market and sex-segregated occupational division) that the Acehese labour market demonstrates. If we consider the vertical axis of the employment status with at the bottom 'unpaid work' and on the top 'employer', BPS statistics exposes a picture of vertical labour market segregation. Out of all different types of employment status that workers may have, women are, just like men, least likely to be an employer.¹⁸ Throughout NAD province, both men and women workers are most likely to be own account workers without an assistant. The pattern of vertical segregation becomes clear when looking at the type of employment that ranks on the second place for women and men: on the second place of most likely to occupy type of work, women are seen to be unpaid workers. Men, however, rank second for being employees and third for own account worker with assistant. Unpaid work only ranks on the fourth place in types of work that they are likely to conduct whereas for women this type of work is on the second place. In other words, of all women workers, 28% are unpaid workers whereas out of all men workers, only 5% are unpaid. Almost 80% of all unpaid work is conducted by women.¹⁹ Women thereby become an invisible force behind much productive work taking place in Aceh by engaging in a type of work that offers very little perspective for upward mobility.

18. Most of the unpaid work is carried out by young women who are estimated to work mostly in informal enterprises or agriculture and fisheries.²⁰ Unpaid workers mostly have an educational background of junior high school and senior high school, which is also the educational background where the highest rates of unemployment can be found. It can be seen as ironic that while social discourse discourages women to engage in paid work so as to ensure more time to take care of their family, in reality, many women find themselves in a triple burden. This triple burden exists of providing family care, providing productive work and not receiving any financial compensation.

19. Vertical segregation is also clearly pronounced in 2002 data of NAD provincial and district councils where women constitute 5% and 3% respectively of all representatives.²¹ Some steps towards positive change on the issue of vertical labour market segregation have been taken by including affirmative action measures in the Aceh Autonomy Bill. Provisions are included to ensure that local political parties are established and formed with at least 30% women members and that the leadership of those parties will comprise a minimum of 30% women.

¹⁷ Overall it is mentioned that 35% of Acehese women have not enjoyed any type of education (Preventing violence against women, Bureau of Women's Empowerment NAD province, 2005).

¹⁸ Almost half of the total employed population has an own account status which implies that there is a dominance of the informal sector in the labour market. This is particularly true for Aceh Jaya, Gayo, Lues, Bireuen, Simeulue and Pidie districts. The majority of all workers in the paid informal sector are men, making up 66% of all workers.

¹⁹ Of all types of workers ranging from wage employment to self employment in the informal economy, unpaid workers count for 14% of the labour force (BPS, 2006).

²⁰ Older women are more likely to be self employed.

²¹ Information provided by UNIFEM in 2006.

20. Clear proof of horizontal segregation whereby occupations are highly sex segregated, was found while looking at data from ILO/Disnaker²² employment service centres where the majority of the male registrants listed professional categories related to construction and transportation, while the categories most commonly chosen by female registrants included 'tailors, dressmakers and hatters', 'nursing and midwifery professionals', 'cooks', 'primary education teaching professionals' and 'weavers and knitters'. Many of those 'female' skills however, such as cooking, tailoring and knitting are hardly needed in the labour market, are of low economic benefit and provide few opportunities for upward mobility (ILO, 2006a).

RECREATION OF LABOUR MARKET SEGREGATION AND WOMEN'S UNEMPLOYMENT

21. Low access to employment opportunities and vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour market expose itself by low labour force participation rates and high unemployment rates among women. In Aceh, this pattern is being recreated through discriminatory employment practices, inadequate skills training, low access to information with regards to job opportunities and inadequate provisions to start up businesses.

22. Discriminatory employment practices are vested in stereotypical perceptions on women's position in Aceh society. They vary greatly and take place both before and during recruitment as well as in the work place. Sometimes, jobs are advertised as open to one sex only or only open to certain age groups. Also, it has been reported that employers sometimes require 'unmarried' status for women. This in particular can restrict women to pursue a career once they get married since it prevents them to move from one employer to another. It has also been noted that especially in traditionally male dominated sectors such as the construction sector, job opportunities are hardly accessible for women, although it is in this sector where many employment opportunities are available. Contractors were found to be reluctant to recruit women, even where they needed workers to carry out unskilled work. Discriminatory practices can also take place on the work floor where employers do not make provisions for workers to balance their family and work responsibilities. This causes women to be forced out of the workplace. Publications of BPP have reported on some of these discriminatory employment practices (Raihan Putry Ali Muhammad, 2001).

23. As mentioned before, discourse on women's role and position defines that if women are to work outside the house, they should mainly participate in work that reflects their reproductive role. This also determines that present vocational training opportunities for women are narrowly constrained to low paid gender stereotyped occupations. They maintain the exclusion of women from more productive sectors in the economy and reinforce stereotypes and discrimination in the workforce. Moreover, the skills provided to women are mostly not adapted to the markets' needs.

24. Low access to information on job opportunities is yet another challenge that Acehese women face in finding their way to paid productive work. Women make less part of the public domain and seem to have more restricted social networks in

²² Department of Manpower.

comparison to men (Save the Children, 2006). Their social networks mainly exist out of other women and only a few men, which perpetuates the circle of low information provision. To obtain information, women are often dependent on husbands or village leaders. Especially this last group was mentioned by Acehnese women as often being 'too busy' to channel information through to women.

25. Several issues can be identified as obstacles for women to set up businesses. Generally women lack business management skills and are therefore unable to successfully run a business. Business support services are unknown amongst most women entrepreneurs and the regulatory environment is unclear. Also, most women entrepreneurs are engaged in trade (which can be easily combined with family care responsibilities) and not so much in services or production. Women lack the vocational skills to engage in these types of businesses. Furthermore, since most women do not have any type of collateral, they are dependent on their husband's collateral for accessing credit. Women's dependence on their husband's approval could be a barrier in starting up a new business. It has been reported that one of the international organizations involved in shelter has put all documents of house ownership in men's names, even though it was recognized that prior to the Tsunami, some of these houses were owned by women. Such practices are disempowering for women and should be avoided.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

26. There are great differences between women workers status in the different districts. Although unemployment rates are higher for females than for males in all of Aceh's districts, in Simeulue, Aceh Besar, Pidie, Bireuen, Aceh Utara and Aceh Jaya, women are highly likely to be unemployed. A remarkable case in terms of women's high unemployment rate is Langsa district where unemployment for women is amongst the highest (31%) and men's unemployment in the lower ranks of 13%. It can be seen that in Banda Aceh, Sabang and Langsa workers are more likely to be employees and not own account workers. These figures seem appropriate considering that at least in the first two districts the formal sector is relatively larger than in other districts. However, in Aceh Tengah, Gayo Lues, Bener Meriah women's and men's unemployment rates are almost as equal. In these cases, as well as in Aceh Tenggara it is notable that women have a very high labour force participation (70%). These women however are likely to have the status of unpaid workers and are probably working in agricultural labour. In Aceh Tamiang, Banda Aceh, Langsa and Lhokseumawe women's labour force participation is very low (about 30%) as well as their numbers as unpaid workers. Generally, there is a trend in which women's participation in the labour force is high and their unemployment rates lower in the rural areas than in urban areas. However, the type of employment that they are likely to occupy in the rural areas is often unpaid work.²³ Higher poverty levels in the rural areas could also contribute to women's participation in the labour force.

27. Besides this, there are several other reasons that could explain the differences between women workers in the different districts. One of them is likely to be connected to the former armed conflict. In those places where many men were

²³ Women's agricultural labour is construed as reproductive rather than productive and therefore often no remuneration is received by these workers (this makes them belong to the category of unpaid workers). As a consequence of this perception, their access to extension services and credit to improve productivity and marketing of farmers' products is constrained.

recruited for GAM forces, mostly in rural areas, women were the main income earners and are thus more likely to participate in the labour force. Rural populations also had restricted movement with as a consequence low access to the more urban centres. Agriculture was the main domain of subsistence in which women are usually accepted as workers.

28. The degree of implementation of the Syari'ah law varies between urban and rural areas. It was reported that women in the rural areas seem to have more freedom to move around than their counterparts in urbanized areas. This could maybe partly explain the higher labour force participation in these areas. It was mentioned by a woman engaged in agricultural labour in one of Aceh's rural areas that it is indeed necessary to adhere to Syari'ah prescriptions of using skirts, but "it is not practical in the field" (ILO, 2006b).

ADDRESSING WOMEN WORKERS' ISSUES IN NAD PROVINCE

29. Four issues can be identified in considering women and work in NAD Province: women's low labour force participation rates, their high levels of unemployment and the vertical and horizontal sex segregation in the labour market. Although the causes for this are to be addressed by all involved, the international development community could play a key role by promoting gender equality. All its interventions with regards to reintegration, reconstruction and peace building in Aceh are guided by the overall principle of contributing to a more just and equitable society. In such a society, previously marginalized groups, particularly women should become full players in the development process.

30. As the tsunami disaster brought together around 124 international NGO's, dozens of donor and UN agencies and 430 local NGO's, (BRR and International Partners, 2005) concerted efforts could and should be made to shift from addressing women's practical gender needs (those needs that women identify in their socially accepted roles in society)²⁴ to addressing women's strategic gender needs which imply a transformation of their position and the elimination of structural inequalities between women and men. This can be achieved by redressing patterns of employment segregation and ensuring sustainable change towards equal access to the labour market for women and men.

31. Acehnese women have long been ready to engage in paid productive work. More so, many of them are ready to take up the challenge of stepping out of their socially ascribed roles and engage in non traditional jobs in order to earn a decent income: they did this when taking over the position of head of the family during the armed conflict and by engaging in debris clearing in the aftermath of the Tsunami.²⁵ By taking up these tasks they acquired new skills that can be capitalized upon. This fluctuation of gender roles could facilitate their entry into previously male-dominated

²⁴ These needs are practical in nature and are concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment.

²⁵ Mercy Corps provided employment for over 76,000 persons in four districts, with average participation of 35 days. 35% of the workers were women. This practice has proven very empowering for women who now use this as an argument when discussing their wish to engage in non-traditional jobs.

sectors and contribute to the breakdown of gender stereotypes which impede their advancement in economic, political and social spheres (ILO, 1998).

32. The opening of market opportunities as a result of the end of armed conflict will facilitate this process. Moreover, the construction boom during which spending will rise from a normal 50 million USD to approximately 2 billion USD a year means that an additional 200,000 workers will be needed in Aceh at the peak of reconstruction efforts in mid-2006 (UNDP, 2005). Acehnese women could benefit from this increase in employment opportunities, but risks are great that if no intervention will be made in facilitating their access to the labour market and in particular to the construction sector, the direct beneficial effects of the construction boom and other reconstruction efforts may not be shared equally between women and men.

33. Possible ways of addressing these issues are the establishment of child care facilities (for example community based or on-site child care), innovative credit schemes that are accessible without collateral, non-stereotypical vocational skills and business training which are flexible in nature as to provide women with the opportunity to respond to their family care responsibilities, sensitization of employers on the elimination of discriminatory employment practices, creative ways of information spreading (such as through radio and women's groups) and capacity building for self-organization of women workers through labour unions and women's organizations. ILO has put an effort in promoting women's access to the labour market by undertaking a number of activities such as engaging women in block and tile making business and in construction and infrastructure work. Also a micro credit scheme in which beneficiaries do not need to possess collateral was launched with an Acehnese financial cooperative.²⁶ During programme implementation it was noted that while Acehnese women may opt for gender stereotyped trades, that may be more reflective of cultural norms than of women's own interests and abilities. A lack of encouragement in pursuing trades in non-traditional areas may result in low engagement of women in possibly beneficial types of entrepreneurship.

34. In the process of negotiating their space in the economic spectrum and empowering themselves economically, men cannot be left out. There will be a need for them to redefine their position and their responsibilities. Women in their turn will need to include them in the bargaining process for more space to occupy higher and more diverse positions in the labour market. As current discourse on masculinity is connected to freedom of movement and leadership, this process of change will not happen overnight.

35. In the meanwhile, it should be noted that, whilst addressing the obstacles and constraints that women face in accessing decent employment, women do not form one homogeneous group. Although social discourse on women's position applies to every woman, women have their own strategies to move away from this discourse, depending on their background. This means that different groups of women will need different approaches. For example, widows seem to be treated in discriminatory ways and are being disadvantaged since they do not have male 'protection'. Especially widows in the older age groups might find it difficult to break through

²⁶ More information on ILO Tsunami Response Programme and its' specific work on promoting gender equality can be found in six 'gender fact sheets' on www.ilo.org/jakarta.

stereotyped roles and might prefer to engage in 'female' jobs. Women ex-GAM combatants expressed a high interest in pursuing further education. Only 28% of them wanted to engage in trade.²⁷ Their second choice of occupation was to become a civil servant or a student (World Bank, 2006). IDP (internally displaced person) women and women hosting IDP's in their families might be overburdened with care tasks and might prefer to engage in home business or in jobs where child care arrangements are available. Poor women are likely to move away from gender stereotyped jobs since they feel the economic necessity to engage in more profitable types of jobs.

36. Aceh's women have high potential to contribute to the development of NAD Province. The international development community in particular has a chance to include women in the development processes and correct imbalances between men and women in the home, workplace and community. As such, equitable and just development could become a reality.

²⁷ Women ex-combatants showed a higher interest than male ex-combatants in pursuing further education. Also, 53% of male ex-combatants expressed the wish to become traders whereas only 28% of women ex-combatants wanted to engage in trade.

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