

**Worksheet**  
**Day One: NUMSA Gender Workshop**

## **GENDER AND GLOBALISATION**

### **Group discussion**

#### ***WORKSHEET FOUR: THE STATE AND SOCIAL BENEFITS***

- In your group read the attached readings. We suggest that comrades take it in turns to read the articles out aloud.
  - Discuss the questions that follow.
  - You will need to elect someone to report-back.
  - Use flipcharts to record your responses.
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- 1) Why do the IMF and the World Bank force governments to cut back on social services when they impose structural adjustment programmes on them?
  - 2) How does it affect women when the state cuts back on, or simply does not provide, social services and benefits? (Examples of social benefits are health care, education, subsidies on food.)
  - 3) What do you think the government should spend money on so that the lives of women are improved?

# THE STATE AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

In the past, the government in many countries provided social welfare benefits to people. These benefits included things like public health care and free education. This is now changing in many countries. Governments today provide fewer services and benefits to people. Instead they hand this job over the private sector. This means that people have to start paying before they get a service. If families can't afford to pay private companies for these services, then someone in the family has to fill the gap. Generally it is women who have to:

- care for the sick when it is too expensive to take them to hospital
- collect firewood because electricity is too expensive
- walk miles to collect water from the river because piped water is too expensive.

Many governments have been forced to change the role they play in the economy by the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposes on them as one of the conditions for lending them money.

Structural adjustment programmes force governments to:

- cut back on public expenditure
- raise the cost of public services
- abolish subsidies on things like food
- hold back, or reduce real wages

“As traditional guarantors of family survival, it is women who are most burdened by making ends meet, who eat last, who are the first to be squeezed out of schooling and jobs, and who pick up the emotional and physical price of coping.”

What ends up happening is that structural adjustment programmes mean that women must provide those services previously provided by the government. And it means that women must bear the costs of rising prices.

As part of the process of cutting back on the role that they play in the economy of a country, and the amount of money that they spend, governments are also cutting back on food subsidies, grants to cover the cost of social services and so on. This means that the price of food goes up – and women must generally bear this cost since they are ones who buy the food for their families.

When there is less food in the house because there is not enough money to buy more, it is often women and girls who end up going hungry since the needs of men are generally prioritised. This is a particular problem for pregnant woman, or woman who are breast-feeding. It not only affects their health, but also the health of the child. Removing subsidies on transport, energy and fuel have similar effects.

### ***The story of Mama Florence:***

“Florence lives in a poor quarter of Lusaka, Zambia’s capital. Prior to the debt crisis, this young woman might have been regarded as one of the better-off in Zambia. But for five years, prices of basic foodstuffs have been rising rapidly and it is more and more difficult to survive on the salary of her husband, a junior clerk in a government office. Often the family have to survive on just one meal a day and they can only afford the luxury of meat on pay day.

Florence’s children are becoming more and more sickly: the youngest has developed an acute respiratory infection. The doctor prescribed a course of medicine but the clinic had run out of the drug because the government could only afford enough foreign exchange to import one-seventh of the country’s requirements of essential drugs. Florence managed to buy the medicine at a high black-market price – and the family’s food allowance for the week went at a stroke. She had to borrow.

A week later, her husband came home with news that, due to the IMF austerity programme, introduced to rescue the economy, the price of maize-meal, the staple foods, was going to double. Florence says, “suddenly it occurred to me that we just wouldn’t survive – we would all go hungry.!”

The price rise prompted thousands of the urban poor to take to the streets and riot. And the food subsidy was restored after a few days. Even so, the incident shows just how close to breaking point successive price rises can push a family which was formerly reasonable well off.”

*From The Oxfam Gender Training Manual 1994*