

# WOMEN *in Action*

No. 3, 1997



Global Subjects: How Did We Get Here?

Paying the Price: Are the Security Nets Really There?

Chronicles of Colonization

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most are *surprised* that they've NOT HEARD about us

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books—the **kind** that are **hard to find**; and

**women's networks**—the kind that are **EMPOWERING**

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# Can Big be Beautiful?

**B**y its etymology alone, globalization is such a big word. So big that it's affecting all of us—some of us without even knowing it. The kind and magnitude of the effect, however, vary. For some, in great positive ways; for others, in many negative ways. Still for others, in devastating proportions.

For some Asian countries (at least before the crash) globalization seemed to have worked for them. They were able to take advantage of rapid technological developments and were able to expand their markets. In effect, improve the standard of living of their people.

In contrast, countries like Indonesia and the Philippines, both desperately attempting to follow the NIC (Newly Industrialized Country) model, are paying a steep price in the name of globalization. Kowtowing to the demands of international monetary institutions and foreign transnational corporations, they have willingly sacrificed their own people's well-being. First to suffer cutbacks are social services on health and education, which are far from adequate to start with. Other areas that have also been badly affected are labor and employment and the state of environment. The fact that transnational corporations are taking the lead in globalization and will continue to do so creates an alarming scenario. Unlike governments, business corporations are not accountable to people. It is very easy for them to disregard workers' welfare, human rights and the environment in their pursuit of greater profits.

The collapse of Southeast Asian currencies also raises a lot of questions. With the recent crash of the Hong Kong stock market, it is evident that no one can really be completely shielded from a global financial shake up. As Michael Walton, former World Bank chief economist for East Asia stressed, "inequality is back on the agenda."

In all of these, it is the women who are the most affected. While this statement is a cliché, it is also true. Women's right to education, better health care and gainful employment are further threatened. Moreover, this so called internationalization of production has given birth to an ever increasing informal sector with women and children as the primary workforce. In Asia, two of the key industries that have so far been greatly affected are garments and agriculture. In both industries, new modes of production such as sub-contracting and contract growing as well as flexible working practices have been affected, endangering labor rights in the process. There is hardly any opportunity for workers to organize among themselves.

Now, what is the role of the women's movement—and of other social movements for that matter—in this phenomenon that looms over us? Are there any means by which we can maximize the benefits of globalization? Given the necessary training, education as well as access and control of resources for production, do women and all other marginalised groups stand a better chance?

This issue of *Women in Action* examines the impact of globalization on women, particularly Asian women.

And while we're looking mostly at consequences to women and the other marginalised sectors, we're also trying to find ways to turn the situation around and see if globalization's benefits really trickles to the bottom. We invite you to a dynamic exchange of opinions on globalization through this last issue for 1997. Read on and take part.



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*On the cover: Poor children and women bear the burdens of trade liberalization and globalization. (Photo courtesy of FAO's Photo Library, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla Rome, Italy)*

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