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**Responding to the Economic Crisis –
Coherent Policies for Growth, Employment and
Decent Work in Asia and Pacific**

Manila, Philippines, 18-20 February 2009

TECHNICAL NOTE

**Asia in the Global Economic Crisis:
Impacts and Responses from
a Gender Perspective**

**ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok
ILO Policy Integration and Statistics Department, Geneva**

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**ASIA IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS:
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A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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I. Introduction and overview

This Technical Note focuses on the gender dimensions of the current global crisis. Its purpose is (i) to discuss how and why the economic crisis will affect men's and women's employment and incomes differently and unequally; and (ii) to advocate that these are important considerations for successful national responses. Failure to take into account the gender dimensions of the crisis may make national responses less than effective; worse, they may aggravate the working and living conditions of certain groups of workers and deepen economic and social inequalities.

Section II, presents emerging trends as regards to economic sectors and groups of workers in Asia that are being adversely affected by the global economic slowdown. As national labour force and employment survey data is not yet available, this Note draws information from newspaper and journal articles from the period December 2008-6 February 2009 across China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Two trends are emerging: (1) Manufacturing and agricultural exports, and construction are foremost adversely affected sectors across several countries; mining, tourism and financial services are also being affected in a few specific areas. Owing to the preponderance and concentration of women in export-oriented industries, they will be severely affected by the crisis. (2) The casual and contract labourers, temporary workers, rural migrant and seasonal workers, and employees in subcontracted and small-scale enterprises have suffered the heaviest blows during the first wave of job cuts. Although this "flexible" layer of workers might be regarded as providing enterprises and national economies "resiliency" to weather the crisis, the social costs to families of workers affected would be significant.

As current news and assessments lack gender-specific information, Section II presents the profile of the employed workforce of seven foremost industries being affected (textiles, garments, electronics and electrical goods, footwear and leather products, cars and auto parts, construction, and tourism-hotels and restaurants) in Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam for which there is national survey microdata. Statistical tables and charts show the gender composition of the industries as well as the differences between men and women with respect to (i) regular-nonregular employment status, (ii) skill level, and (iii) pay level. The data show that women are concentrated in non-regular employment, in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, and in low pay levels. Based on emerging trends under the current crisis and the 1997 Asian crisis, non-regular, low-paid, and unskilled or semi-skilled workers are more likely to be the first to lose their job and to suffer heavily from a decline in level of living.

Section III explains how and why the employment and social impacts of the economic crisis are transmitted differently to men and women. Aggregate and net effects of the crisis at national, sectoral or local levels obscure important differences between groups of workers. In addition, workers respond to loss of paid work and real incomes in different ways, and gender is one important differentiating factor. To illustrate these gender issues, Section III also recalls patterns during the 1997 Asian crisis.

Finally, Section IV focuses on policy responses to the economic crisis in Asia. First, it asks whether a social floor exists in Asia that might cushion the negative effects of the crisis on people's lives, and whether this gives equal protection to men and women. Second, it synthesizes the arguments why responses should reach women. Finally, the section highlights gender-specific issues that are particularly relevant to some of the major programmes being planned.

II. Current crisis - emerging trends and gender dimensions

A. Emerging trends: sectors and workers at risk

The full impact of the global crisis on Asia is still unfolding. Major export-oriented industries dependent on US and European markets have already felt the economic crunch. Among them are the traditional labour-intensive exports from developing countries, i.e. textiles and garments, footwear and leather products, and electronics, handicrafts and toys; gems and jewellery from India and Thailand; processed wood, processed seafood, and agriculture export crops (coffee, rubber, rice, cashews) from Vietnam. Construction and car and auto parts manufacturing (among the sectors that have reported substantial layoffs) are also among the top sectors already suffering from job losses. Tourism and financial services have likewise been affected. Owing to the concentration of women in the employed workforces of labour-intensive exports, the contraction of global markets for these sectors implies huge risks for women workers.

In addition, news reports indicate that temporary, casual, seasonal and contract labourers and low-skilled workers are being laid-off first. These workers are highly vulnerable to job loss because they are unlikely to be covered by any form of social insurance or protection. Those with low-skill or only job-specific skills will have limited alternative job prospects, especially since thousands of others will be in the same situation.

As regards international migrant workers, women are concentrated in skilled health care professions (nurses, midwives) but also in domestic care services (live-in carers, nannies, housekeepers, and domestic helpers) whereas male migrants are clustered in construction, manufacturing and agriculture. Some suggest that health care professionals employed in public health care institutions in developed countries, where health budgets are likely to be protected, face fewer risks of losing their jobs than professionals employed by private institutions and domestic care services workers.

B. Gender composition of “workers at risk”

Workers are not similarly situated in the labour market; their sector and occupation, employment status, education and skill endowments, and, not least, their gender, make them more or less vulnerable to losing their jobs. This section illustrates this by looking

particularly at the seven (7) industry groups that, according to the news reports, are already experiencing the negative effects of the global crisis: textiles, garments, footwear & leather products, electronics (plus electrical and telecommunications products), car manufacturing and auto-parts, hotels and restaurants (key parts of tourism), and construction. The micro datasets of 2005 (1st quarter) Labour Force Surveys of Thailand and the Philippines, and 2004 Living Standards Measurement Survey of Vietnam were analysed for this purpose.

The data show that employment patterns, and thus vulnerability to the impacts of the crisis, follow gender lines.

Gender composition of the employed workforce of the 7 industries (Table 1): In absolute terms, women dominate the workforces of garments, textiles and electronics at a ratio of 2-5 female workers for every male worker. Their preponderance in these manufacturing industries means women are experiencing the first blows of job cuts. Moreover, garments, textiles, electronics and electrical products, and hotels and restaurants account for substantial percentages of women's total employment in the three countries; this implies that significant contraction of these industries will erode gains achieved by women in paid employment in the past 2-3 decades. For men, construction is a top industrial job generator across all three countries; they also dominate this sector as they constitute 80-95 per cent of its employed force. Men's employment will be hurt badly by the decline in construction. Manufacturing of cars and auto parts is also an important source of employment for men particularly in Thailand.

Allocation of male and female employees between regular and non-regular employment (Table 2): Monthly payment is used here as a proxy for regular employment status, and non-monthly payment (i.e. paid on daily, hourly, piece-rate, commission basis or in kind), for non-regular employment status. Non-regular workers are less likely to be entitled to social insurance and severance pay and do not have the same opportunities to negotiate for fair dismissal conditions. The Vietnam survey does not provide this information. Between Thailand and the Philippines, the former has relatively higher proportion of non-monthly paid workers. In Thailand, textiles, garments, footwear and leather products, hotels and restaurants and construction post very high levels of non-regular employment. Proportionately more women than men have non-regular employment situation in all industries except the automotive and electronics industries. In the Philippines, there is a relatively higher incidence of non-regular employment in electronics, hotels and restaurants, and automotive industry; and proportionately more men than women are non-regular workers except in construction, automotive industry, and footwear.

Unskilled & semi-skilled (Table 3): The proportion of male and female employees who are engaged in "elementary occupations", jobs that require no or few skills was also examined. Compared to Thailand and the Philippines, Vietnam has relatively higher proportions of workers in elementary occupations. Hotels and restaurants, and construction tend to have the highest percentages of elementary occupations across all three countries. The relative proportion of men and women engaged in elementary occupations by industry does not follow the same pattern across the countries.

Low-paid workers (Charts 1-6): The location of a worker in the pay hierarchy is an indication of his/her employment status and vulnerability to falls in real incomes. Low-paid workers are likely to have less or limited savings as compared to those in higher-paid positions. Even a small pay cut or rise in prices of goods and services could severely damage their welfare and that of their families. Overall, the data for Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam show that women workers, who are employed in elementary

occupations and in the seven industries, tend to be concentrated in lower pay level than men.¹

III. Why the crisis will affect women & men differently and unequally

Job losses are not evenly distributed across the working population. The effects of GDP contraction are transmitted to women and men in the labour market differently and unequally. Prevailing gender-specific inequalities in labour markets, and norms and views about women's and men's economic role explain the *gendered* patterns.

Gender-based job segregation

The sex-typing of occupations means that the demand for female (or male) labour is dependent on demand in female-dominated sectors and jobs. Women have typically constituted the great majority of the workforce of labour-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing, from clothing, footwear and processed foods to micro-circuits and electronic products. Men's primary occupations tend to be more diversified over a wider range of economic sub-sectors than women's employment, but in some economies, they may also be heavily concentrated in farming and construction, in addition to land transport, capital-intensive manufacturing, and public administration. Certain sectors might have a near balance between men and women, such as the relatively young IT-based back office operations and banking and financial services.

1997 Asian crisis: Job segregation and job losses along gender lines

In Thailand, manufacturing and construction were hit the hardest. The preponderance of women workers in the export sector and the decline in exports made women very vulnerable; altogether women comprised some 53 per cent of laid-off workers (Mahmood et al, 2001). As a proportion of retrenched workers in particular industries, women made up 95 per cent in garments, 88 per cent in toys, 80 per cent in knitting and electrical appliances, 73 per cent in jewellery, 71 per cent in plastic products and 68 per cent in footwear and leather products. In Indonesia, the largest reduction in workforce occurred in non-oil manufacturing, followed by construction; other job losses occurred in government, financial services and tourism, which are female-intensive (Frankenberg 1999). In Korea, manufacturing, construction, trade and financial services suffered losses. About 86 per cent of retrenched workers in banking and financial services sectors in Korea were women (Aslanbeigui et al 2000).

The buffer workforce (casuals, contractuels, homeworkers); women as a flexible reserve

Export market dynamics have generated a layer of flexible and mobile workforce (casual, temporary workers, contract workers and homeworkers) who serve as a buffer to accommodate just-in-time ordering, fluctuations in orders and prices, and stiff competition among suppliers, while a smaller core of regular, permanent workers ensure quality and stability.² The production structure has been likened to a pyramid: at the tip are workers in

¹ Interpretation of Charts 1-6: The shaded boxes in the charts refer to 50 percent of the men or women in each category. The horizontal line inside the box refers to the median real hourly pay.

² Braunstein (2006) reports that one-third of firms in electronics, textiles and garments subcontracted in 2000; in Thailand, 38 per cent of garment workers were homeworkers while in the Philippines, they comprised 25-40 per cent. Barrientos (2007) reports of case studies in agriculture and manufacturing across a range of countries have found that even first-level suppliers with direct linkages to internationally recognized brands and retailers often use casual, migrant and contract labour to meet seasonal fluctuations in demand or sudden changes in orders.

permanent employment with better benefits, social entitlements and better able to organize; towards the bottom are workers employed by 2nd and 3rd tier subcontractors and hired through third-party providers, homeworkers and migrant workers. While women's paid employment has vastly expanded with the growth of exports, they are concentrated in lower segments of global supply chains, where jobs are insecure, wages are low, and working conditions are poor.³

Women are often regarded as a flexible reserve, to be drawn into the labour market in upturns and expelled in downturns.⁴ During normal economic times, the flexible workforce experiences high job turnover, moving from one factory or production workshop to another, or shifting between formal sector and informal activity. Thus, during economic downturns and recessions, they are most likely the first to lose their jobs.

1997 Asian crisis: the flexible reserve

Wage and salaried employees were primarily affected in all countries; but other groups of workers also suffered losses (Gragnotti 2001; Betcherman and Islam 2001). Unskilled occupations and less educated, less skilled workers were displaced in greater proportions than professional and better educated categories. In Thailand and Indonesia, self-employed and unpaid family workers experienced loss of job, business, or earnings. In South Korea, regular workers were mainly affected, but temporary and daily workers were not far behind. In Malaysia, job cuts were borne by foreign workers. Malaysia stopped issuing work permits to international migrant workers and raised the cost of work permits for those who had them.

Male-breadwinner, female-caregiver bias

The notion that men are, or should be, the primary breadwinner and women are, or should be, the primary caretaker of the family and caregiver is a dominant ideology. It influences not only how households allocate paid and unpaid work among their members; it also permeates social and labour policies and programmes. There are many examples in public policy; among others, the inequitable access of women to social security entitlements as it is assumed that women rely on men's social security benefits; lack of child care support because women are assumed to stay home; and lower wages for women because they are assumed to be secondary income-earners.

1997 Asian crisis: The "male-breadwinner bias"

The rise in unemployment in Korea was not the same for men and women; men's unemployment rate increased more than women's, although women employees may have experienced the same (if not more) job loss rate as men. These statistics do not tell the full story. Employment numbers fell by 3.8 per cent for men but by 7.1 per cent for women (Elson 2008). According to Pilwha's (1998) comparison of employment between July 1997 and July 1998, the number of female clerical workers decreased by 18.4 per cent while men in the same group did not post any loss; female services and sales workers lost jobs by 6.5 per cent but men in the same occupational group did not. In addition, female mechanical, machine operators and unskilled workers decreased by 14.8 per cent as men in the same occupational category decreased by 15.3 per cent. She reported accounts of unequal treatment of men and women in dismissal practices of Korean enterprises; married women or women in general were generally laid off first before men in similar occupations. Male regular employees decreased by 6.4 per cent while their female counterparts decreased by 19.7 per cent. Alongside this, male temporary and daily workers decreased by 6.4 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively; female temporary and daily workers decreased by 6.1 per cent and 8.6 per cent respectively (Pilwha 1998). Women's participation rates, which were consistently lower than men's in almost all age groups with exception of the 15-24 age group, went down sharply (Horton et al 2001). Many women were discouraged; the female labour force decreased by 330,000 while men increased by 120,000 in 1997-98 (Kang et al 2001). At the same time, women's paid work became informal as some became unpaid family workers (Horton et al 2001).

³ King DeJardin, A. 2009. *Gender (in) equality, globalization and governance*, Working Paper NO. 92, Policy Integration and Statistics Department, Geneva, ILO.

⁴ Studies of economic recessions in several developed countries in North America, Europe and Asia show that women's employment moved procyclically, and significantly more procyclically than men's (Rubery 1988).

Demand for women: a cheaper labour substitute for men's labour?

Another pattern might be that women's employment is counter-cyclical because of the business sector's search for cost-saving measures such as cheaper forms of labour, such as hiring women at lower wages, and substituting non-regular workers for regular workers. Although this phenomenon occurs during hard economic times, cost-saving could also lead to a substitution of men for women, regular workers by casuals and subcontracted workers in the long-term. This substitution process is consistent with women's role as buffer workforce.

1997 Asian crisis: Bad quality jobs for good jobs

Non-permanent jobs increased for both men and women in the Philippines (Lim 2000). The number of daily workers in Korea rose between the 4th quarter of 1997 to the same period in 1998 (Kang et al 2001). Anecdotal evidence collected by the World Bank showed that export processing plants retrenched regular workers most of whom were women, and rehired them as piece-rate workers at lower wages (Aslanbeigui 2000). In the same vein, replacement of regular workers by temporary, casual workers, and longer overtime work was reported in Thailand (Karnjanauksorn et al 1998). There were also reports in the Philippines that some enterprises laid-off men and replaced them with women who were paid at lower wages but perhaps more willing to work longer hours and in multiple tasks (Ilo 1998).

Distress employment: shift to informal employment

Most displaced workers may be too poor not to work. Instead of a rise in open unemployment, an economic decline could lead to a rise in underemployment and informal employment in urban and rural areas. The high proportion of women in informal employment – as unpaid family workers in household enterprises, own-account workers, micro business operators, subcontracted homeworkers and domestic services workers – is widely documented. The influx of displaced male workers from the formal economy (and equipped with their severance pay and savings) could crowd out women's economic activities or push them into less viable activities, more poorly paid jobs or unpaid market work.

1997 Asian crisis: Rise in informal employment, shift to rural employment

Employment shifted from industry to agriculture or to trade and services – sectors that have a high concentration of informal and low-paid employment. Job losses in Indonesia (in industry) and in the Philippines (in agriculture and industry) were compensated by gains in services (a substantial 21.4 per cent increase in the Philippines), and agriculture (a 5.4 per cent increase in Indonesia) (Islam et al 2001, Esguerra et al 2001). In several countries, the decline in wage employment was accompanied by an increase in informal employment: as employers and self-employed workers engaged in micro and small businesses in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines (Betcherman and Islam 2001; Lim 2000). In Indonesia, wage employment declined substantially, while the number of self-employed and unpaid family workers grew by 6.3 per cent and 8.1 per cent, respectively, between 1997 and 1998 (Islam et al, 2001). Korea saw a small increase in unpaid family workers, who were more likely women (Horton et al 2001). In Indonesia and Thailand, many displaced workers returned to the rural areas where agricultural work could be sought, reversing the rural-to-urban migration flows. (McGee et al 1999; Focus on Global South and Save the Children 2001; Gragnolatti 2001; Jones et al 2000).

Distress employment: women's "added-worker" effect

In times of hardships, and especially among low-income and poor families, women are often obliged to provide a safety net through informal paid work and unpaid work. Women find alternative jobs more quickly because they are also often more willing to accept lower paying jobs and informal work than men.

1997 Asian crisis: Women as “added-workers”

Based on the findings from a Indonesian longitudinal sample survey covering 1997 and 1998 (the Indonesia Family Life Survey), many men left the labour force and about the same number entered; many women exited the labour force but even more entered and most of the new entrants worked in their own or family business as self-employed and unpaid family workers (Aslanbeigui et al 2000; Thomas et al 2000).⁵ The increase in unpaid work was especially significant among middle-aged and older women. It was also found that families with young women aged 15-24 years old were less likely to sink into poverty as the young women entered the labour force, compensating for the retrenched workers (Frankenberg et al 1999). Men’s shift from formal, wage employment to informal and agricultural work involved a reduction in their working hours and pay. In contrast, women posted a net increase in working hours as they worked overtime and took on multiple informal jobs in order to compensate for men’s lower take-home pay and higher cost of living (Islam et al, 2001). Data from IFLS suggested that while the fall in women’s average working hours in the formal sector was more than in that of men’s, the proportion of women with long working hours (more than 45 hours per week) rose from 22.9 per cent in 1997 to 24.9 per cent in 1998.⁶ Philippine data concur: increase in long working hours among women; women’s immediate search for alternative or multiple jobs after retrenchment (Illo 1998; Lim 2000; Focus on Global South and Save the Children 2001).

Unpaid care work & women’s double burden: heavier for the poor

While women might be assumed to perform the primary caregiving and caretaking role within households, many of them are actually engaged in paid, market work in the informal economy (trading, home-based production, domestic helpers, etc) and formal economy. Women’s earnings from paid work often constitute an important part of subsistence of low-income or poor families. Yet, low-income families rely heavily on unpaid care provided by family members (mostly women’s) because they do not have adequate access to water, energy and sanitation infrastructure and because they can hardly afford market-based health, and child and elderly care services. The time for unpaid domestic work is traded with paid (market) work, sometimes at the expense of the welfare children and whole family. Unpaid care work further constrains women’s options for paid work: how much time to engage in paid work outside the home; when; how far from home, how flexible its demand should be.

1997 Asian crisis: Negative social consequences

Because of the inadequacy of social protection systems in all five Asian countries, populations relied on traditional private support systems provided by family and community (Lee and Rhee 2000; Jones et al 2000). This had serious implications for low-income families and women’s paid work. A small survey in the Philippines of the social impact of the crisis on women and children showed that 94 per cent of households of retrenched women reported a fall in income compared to 65 per cent of households of retrenched men. Moreover, more households of retrenched women than that of retrenched men reported reduced their meal allocation. Forty six per cent of the households reported that female members were obliged to undertake more household work and income generating activities, leading to a substantial reduction in already low leisure time (one in four households) deteriorating relationship with children (1 in 4 households), and more frequent conflicts between spouses (1 in 8 households) (Focus on Global South and Save the Children, 2001).

⁵ The IFLS was a large-scale, longitudinal integrated socio-economic and health survey that collected extensive information on households, families and communities. For fuller description of the survey, see E. Frankenberg and D. Thomas, *Indonesia Family Life Survey: Study design and results from Waves 1 and 2*, RAND DRU-2238/1-NIA/NICHD, Santa Monica, CA:RAND

⁶ For men, the proportion fell although the absolute number of men working long hours was still twice as many as that of women.

IV. Responses to the crisis

A. Is a gender-equal social floor in place in Asia?

How far and deep will the employment and social consequences of the global crisis go in Asia? Are women and men equally protected?

Much depends on the social policies in place; and on the response that Governments and social partners will be able to deliver. Since the 1990s, many governments in Asia have strengthened existing social protection systems, reflecting a growing consensus on the importance of social protection. Thailand is among the countries that made improvements in social protection, specifically with regards to unemployment benefits, pensions (introduced in 1998), universal healthcare (introduced in 2002), and unemployment insurance (introduced in 2004) (ILO 2008a). South Korea adopted long-term improvements in the coverage and benefits package of unemployment insurance and the national pensions programme, and unified the country's health insurance schemes (ILO 2008a). Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines do not have unemployment insurance in place. Vietnam only recently implemented one and China expanded its benefits (ISSA 2006). Most maternity protection systems (56 out of 100) in Asia are paid solely by employers; this means that this entitlement is at risk in the current crisis (Oun et al 2005). Only 28 systems pay benefits through social security. Aggregated social security coverage ratios for selected Asian countries show that a small proportion of the population have access to meaningful protection: Bangladesh, 10.2 percent; Indonesia, 34.6 percent; Pakistan, 6.5 percent; and Vietnam, 6.5 percent (Cichon et al 2007).

From the gender equality viewpoint, there are gaps in these formal schemes. For example, spouses and children of beneficiaries are often not covered by social security benefits. In China, Viet Nam and Thailand, women are often not covered by their husbands' pension funds (ILO 2008b). In general, women are disadvantaged by social protection systems that are linked to labour market status as they are concentrated in non-standard conditions of employment, lower-wage employment, and the informal economy or have lower employment rates than men (Cichon et al 2007).

The questions that call for close examination at this time are: Are existing instruments adequate? Do women and men have equal entitlements? How can those who have inadequate or no entitlements (i.e. workers in the informal economy and in non-standard and low-paid jobs) be covered by a basic level of social protection?

B. Why it is crucial to reach women equally as men

With regards to formulating responses to the crisis, there are three reasons why it is critical to reach women and men equally:

- Women's income plays a greater role in household income and welfare the poorer the family. The male breadwinner-female caregiver model no longer fits reality. The greater portion of households depends on more than one income earner. In time of hardships, women will tend to increase their time in paid work, even if this means more overtime hours and multiple jobs at low pay.
- Low-income households rely more on unpaid care work largely provided by women. This means that in hard times, their time will be stretched between paid work and

unpaid care work at the cost of the welfare of young children and the sick and their own personal health.

- Gains in gender equality, in terms of expansion of women's access to paid work and control over income, and will be lost with long-term damage on social and human development, unless equality of treatment and opportunity guide policy responses to the crisis.

C. Responses with a gender perspective

Unemployment insurance, severance pay and provident funds, which are associated with formal, regular employment contracts and job tenure, are not adequate in labour markets where temporary, casual and informal workers make up the majority of the workforce. Labour market interventions cannot reach all vulnerable groups, such as single mothers with young children, and those with health problems.

The national policy responses that have been adopted or are being considered cover a wide range. The comments below focus on three major groups of responses: job creation through public works programmes and green recovery plans; microfinance for small and micro enterprises; and support for low-income households. In addition, two policy concerns are raised: the role of social dialogue in responding to the crisis; and gender-disaggregated analysis.

Public works programmes and green recovery plans

Public infrastructure and investment programmes have the potential of addressing massive numbers of unemployed workers. There are several advantages to these programmes. Unlike unemployment insurance, these can be made accessible to all unemployed workers, regardless of their previous employment status. These generate paid jobs while improving and creating physical assets and, if so designed, social services and infrastructure (e.g. health care, childcare, education). Depending on the design, such programmes could guarantee families a minimum level of income while enhancing individual self-worth and autonomy, and promoting an individual's right to work.

However, the bulk of jobs created may be appropriated by men because of the following factors:

- Construction jobs will be male sex-typed because 80-90 per cent of construction workforce is male. In addition, relatively fewer women will have the skills required by infrastructure construction. Much of the "green recovery" packages being proposed (e.g. South Korea) consist of highly technical and professional occupations. Engineering and physical science professionals are still heavily dominated by men.⁷
- Even where jobs can be performed by women, men may still be perceived as more suitable.

⁷ Thailand and Philippines are examples, based on LFS 2005.

- Facilities in construction sites may be conceived only with male workers' needs in mind. Women require secure areas for their personal needs and women with childcare responsibilities need childcare services.

The 1997 Asian crisis experience with massive public works programmes pointed this out. Female participation in Indonesia's public works programme was low, while women comprised nearly half of participants in South Korea's programme, which included schemes specifically targeted to women.

Equal access by women and women may be enhanced by:

- Expanding the concept of "public works" to employment-intensive public investment programmes which can incorporate social services and environmental protection components. Social services could include the delivery of essential community-based social services – auxiliary health care, care for elderly, childcare, early childhood development, and youth development activities. These components would attract women and the youth; some activities would not need more than secondary education complemented by short training courses.
- Designing recruitment and information dissemination strategies so that they reach women in the target population. Women with childcare and family responsibilities usually need advance information to organize their schedule. Childcare services and women-specific basic facilities at construction and project sites will make these programmes more accessible to women.⁸
- Initiatives and schemes that especially target unemployed women may have to be considered to ensure that they have equal access to jobs.

Microfinance for micro and small businesses

Microfinance has played a major role in enabling hundreds of thousands of poor women to set up their own businesses, gain financial autonomy and improve their decision-making power within their households. Experiences across Asia, Latin America and Africa attest to this. Microfinance has become an important component of anti-poverty strategies in developing countries. Some say that microcredit was a "valuable lifeline" for women during the 1997 Asian crisis.⁹

However, concerns have been expressed that the credit crisis will hurt microfinance programmes in South Asia.¹⁰ The current crisis could mean a fall in the supply of loan funds from donors and financial institutions, or higher interest rates. Financial pressures on families may lead to fewer saving and more withdrawals from microfinance institutions. The crisis also exerts pressures on business profitability and viability. An executive director of BRAC, one of the largest providers of financial services to the poor in Bangladesh, having disbursed more than \$5M to nearly seven million people since 1972, mostly women, has

⁸ A comparative assessment of public works programmes across Asia and Africa show that design features, targeting and recruitment strategies, wage setting and support and auxiliary activities (e.g. skills training, social mobilization, community participation) directly and indirectly enhance or hamper women's participation. King Dejardin 1996.

⁹ "Small loans help women weather Asian crisis", U.N. Wire, August 13, 1999, United Nations Foundation.

¹⁰ Chandran, R. (Reuters), "Credit crisis hurts microfinance programs in South Asia," *International Herald Tribune*, November 17, 2008. Littlefield, E., "Microfinance and the financial crisis", CGAP, November 18, 2008. Available at <http://microfinance.cgap.org>

declared “if commercial banks are affected, then the expansion of microfinance program will be affected.”¹¹ Including support to microfinance particularly targeted to women in poor households and communities should be part of fiscal stimulus packages.

Protect social spending: important for poor families, human capital & gender equity

Pressures on families, communities and individuals will likely affect their investments in education and health care. Government budgets will also be under pressure to cut public spending. When real household incomes and government social spending fall, households cope to meet basic needs through a variety of damaging ways, such as pulling children out of school, sending them and the elderly to work, and reducing food consumption and health care. These have severe implications on poverty and social inequalities. Women of poor families will bear the brunt through increased unpaid care work and paid work.

Provision of basic health care and education should be a critical part of social policy responses to the crisis. Basic health care should include maternal health care and maternity protection. Fees for maternal care and obstetric services impose financial burdens on households.

Social dialogue and women’s voice

Social dialogue and participation of social partners in managing and addressing the crisis will be necessary for effective responses. Making explicit women’s voice and equal representation should be part of this process. However, this requires the presence of strong social partners’ organizations as well as women’s representation in their leadership and on negotiating panels. During the 1997 Asian crisis, the role of social dialogue and social actors in managing the crisis and responses was weak in most countries (Campbell 2001).¹² According to a few gender-specific studies, women did not have a role or an effective voice because trade union leaderships and collective bargaining and dispute settlement mechanisms were dominated by male leaders, even in female-intensive industries (Pilwha 1998; Illo 1998; Karnjanauksorn et al 1998).

Gender-disaggregated analysis of labour market impacts

The availability of up-to-date information on employment and poverty would have facilitated the proper design and targeting of programmes. Impact assessments of the crisis and of alternative policy responses will need to be gender-disaggregated for successful policy interventions. As argued by previous sections, aggregate numbers and net effects mask important differences between men and women.

¹¹ Chandran, *ibid.*

¹² The Government of Malaysia created the National Economic Action Council which was charged with the National Economic Recovery Plan. The tripartite Labor Advisory Council drew up guidelines on retrenchment aimed at ensuring that procedures were equitable and at providing alternatives to retrenchment. In the Philippines, a Social Accord on Industrial Harmony and Stability between the Employers’ Confederation of the Philippines and two national trade union federations provided six months mutual restraint on layoffs and industrial disputes. But the fragmentation of the labour movement impeded the development of a clear and comprehensive strategy. In South Korea, the Tripartite Social Accord gave guidelines for layoffs. In Thailand, the Committee on the Alleviation of Unemployment, created by the Prime Minister in December 1997, had minimal worker and employer representation.

VI. Appendix – Tables and Charts

A. Tables

Table 1: Gender Composition of Selected Industries at risk

Selected Industries at risk	Thailand (LFS 2005)			Philippines (LFS 2005)			Vietnam (VLSMS 2004)		
	%Share of total employed by sex		W/M	%Share of total employed by sex		W/M	%Share of total employed by sex		W/M
	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women	
Textiles	0.77%	3.14%	3.22	0.35%	1.25%	2.15	0.28%	0.80%	2.85
Garments	0.91%	4.30%	3.75	0.57%	3.41%	3.60			
Electronics (& electrical prods, telecom)	0.77%	2.10%	2.14	0.47%	1.64%	5.35	0.14%	0.15%	2.30
Footwear, leather products	0.30%	0.63%	1.67	0.19%	0.25%	0.79	0.55%	1.00%	1.80
Tourism (Hotels, Restaurants)	4.49%	10.09%	1.77	2.03%	3.67%	1.09	1.69%	5.08%	2.99
Auto (plants, parts,...)	4.37%	1.49%	0.27	1.67%	0.47%	0.47	1.36%	0.20%	0.22
Construction	11.15%	2.39%	0.17	8.56%	0.28%	0.02	9.37%	0.94%	0.10

Table 2: Share of non-monthly paid in selected industries: Men, Women and All

Selected Industries at risk	Thailand (LFS 2005)			Philippines (LFS 2005)		
	%Share of non monthly paid in industry			%Share of non monthly paid in industry		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Textiles	90.81%	74.31%	86.90%	22.47%	10.01%	13.96%
Garments	82.51%	75.81%	81.10%	23.82%	16.52%	18.11%
Electronics (& electrical prods, telecom)	56.43%	41.72%	51.75%	58.01%	49.25%	52.09%
Footwear, leather products	75.59%	68.44%	72.92%	19.36%	27.57%	22.98%
Tourism (Hotels, Restaurants)	85.67%	79.08%	83.30%	46.69%	34.90%	40.55%
Auto (plants, parts,...)	43.94%	57.24%	54.42%	26.25%	56.82%	30.68%
Construction	89.78%	90.73%	90.60%	10.57%	41.99%	11.19%

Table 3: Share of unskilled workers (elementary occupations) in selected Industries: Men, Women and All

Selected Industries at risk	Thailand (LFS 2005)			Philippines (LFS 2005)			Vietnam (VLSMS 2004)		
	%Unskilled in industry: Men, Women, All			%Unskilled in industry: Men, Women, All			%Unskilled in industry: Men, Women, All		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
Textiles	3.13%	6.88%	4.02%	11.39%	4.70%	6.82%	11.48%	23.11%	20.09%
Garments	3.16%	6.06%	3.77%	13.92%	5.46%	7.30%			
Electronics (& electrical prods, telecom)	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%
Tourism (Hotels, Restaurants)	16.10%	20.82%	17.80%	13.11%	7.76%	10.32%	74.87%	82.99%	80.95%
Auto (plants, parts,...)	10.92%	3.40%	4.99%	3.28%	10.62%	4.35%	25.44%	30.02%	26.02%
Construction	68.77%	20.76%	27.69%	31.26%	17.92%	31.00%	53.14%	71.13%	54.78%

B. Charts

Chart 1: Thailand - Real hourly pay distribution of male and female workers in agricultural and non-agricultural elementary occupations (LFS 2005)

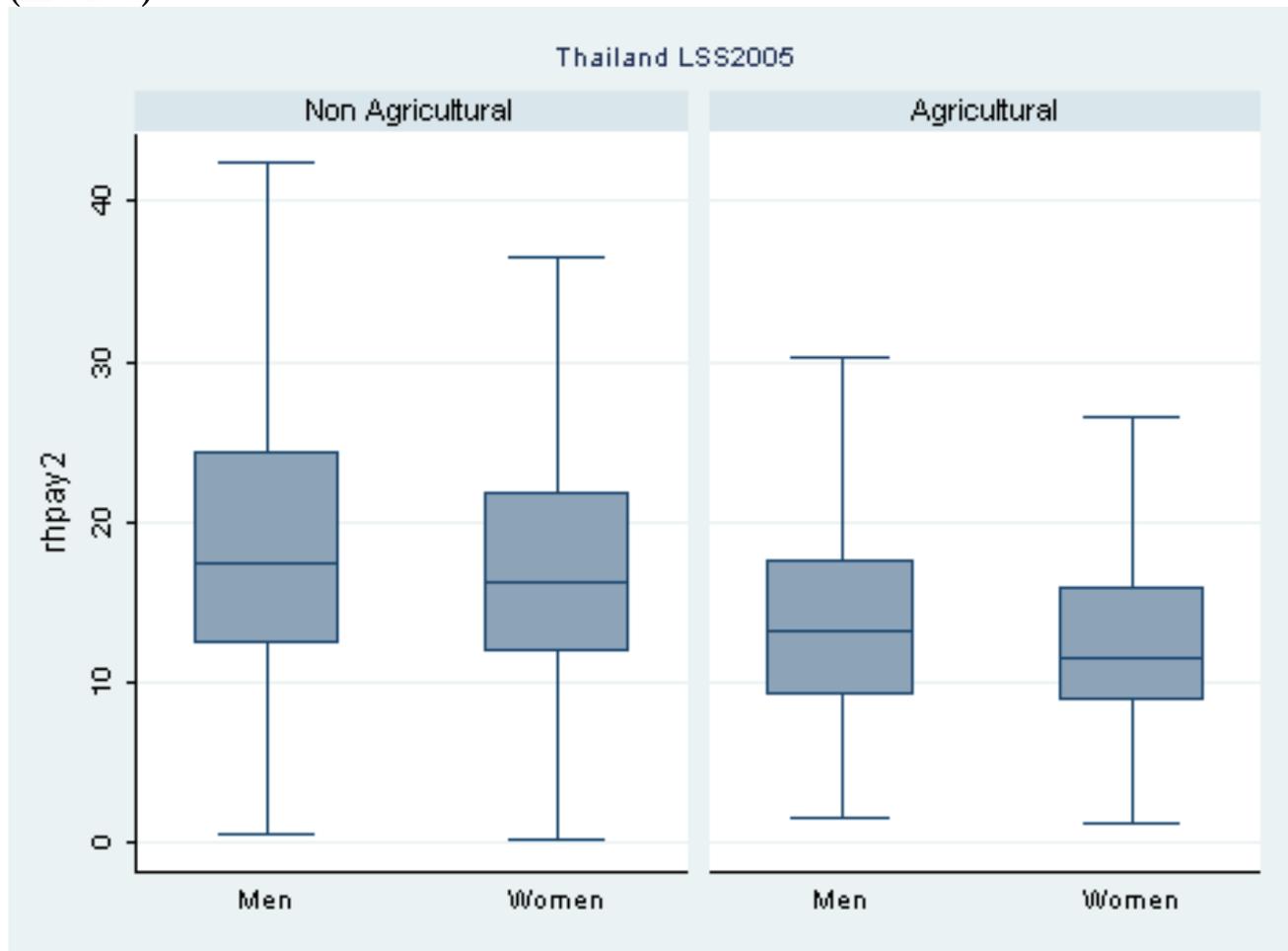


Chart 2: Philippines - Real hourly pay distribution of male and female workers in agricultural and non-agricultural elementary occupations (LFS 2005)

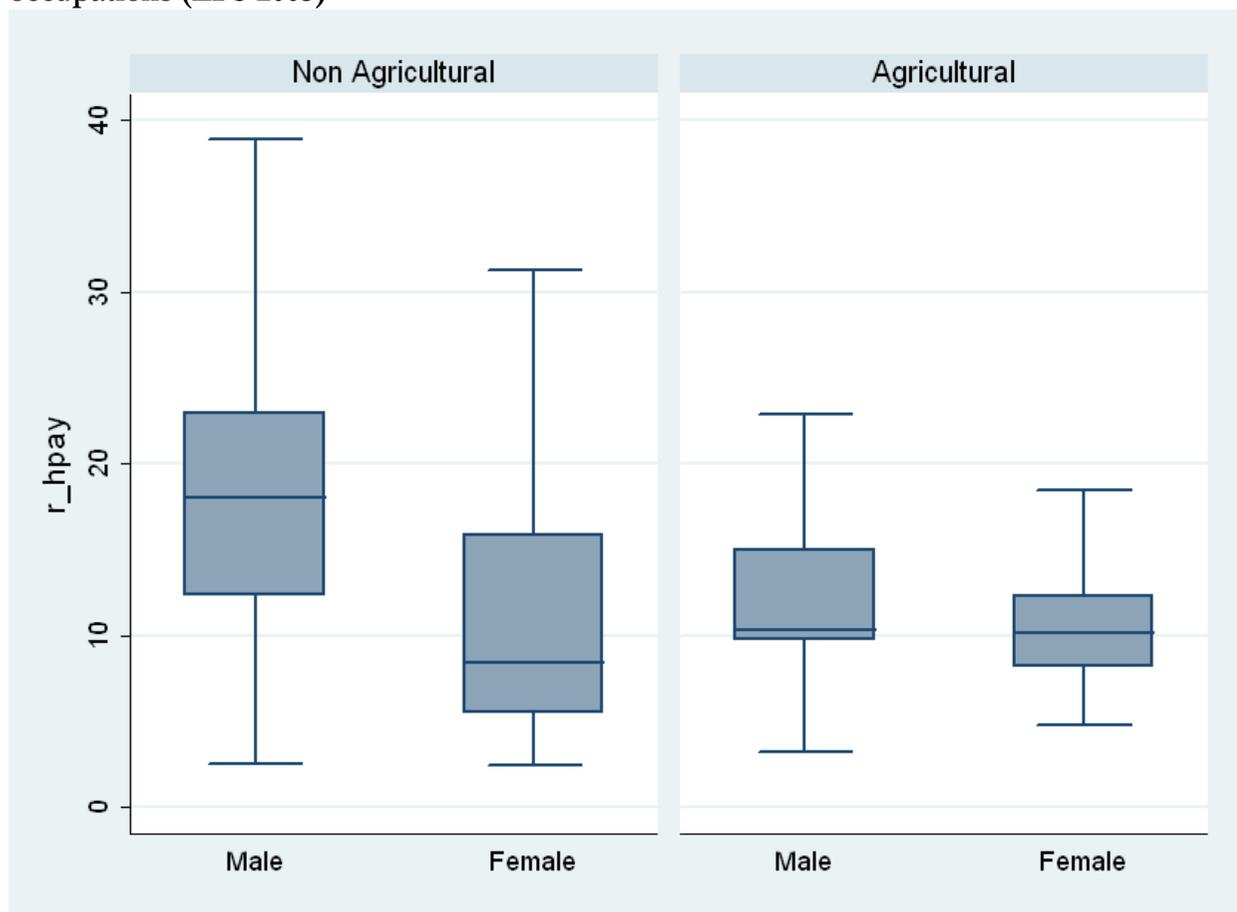


Chart 3: Vietnam – Real hourly pay distribution of male and female workers in agricultural and non-agricultural elementary occupations (VLSMS 2004)



Chart 4: Thailand – Real hourly pay distribution of male and female workers in seven industries at risk (LFS 2005)

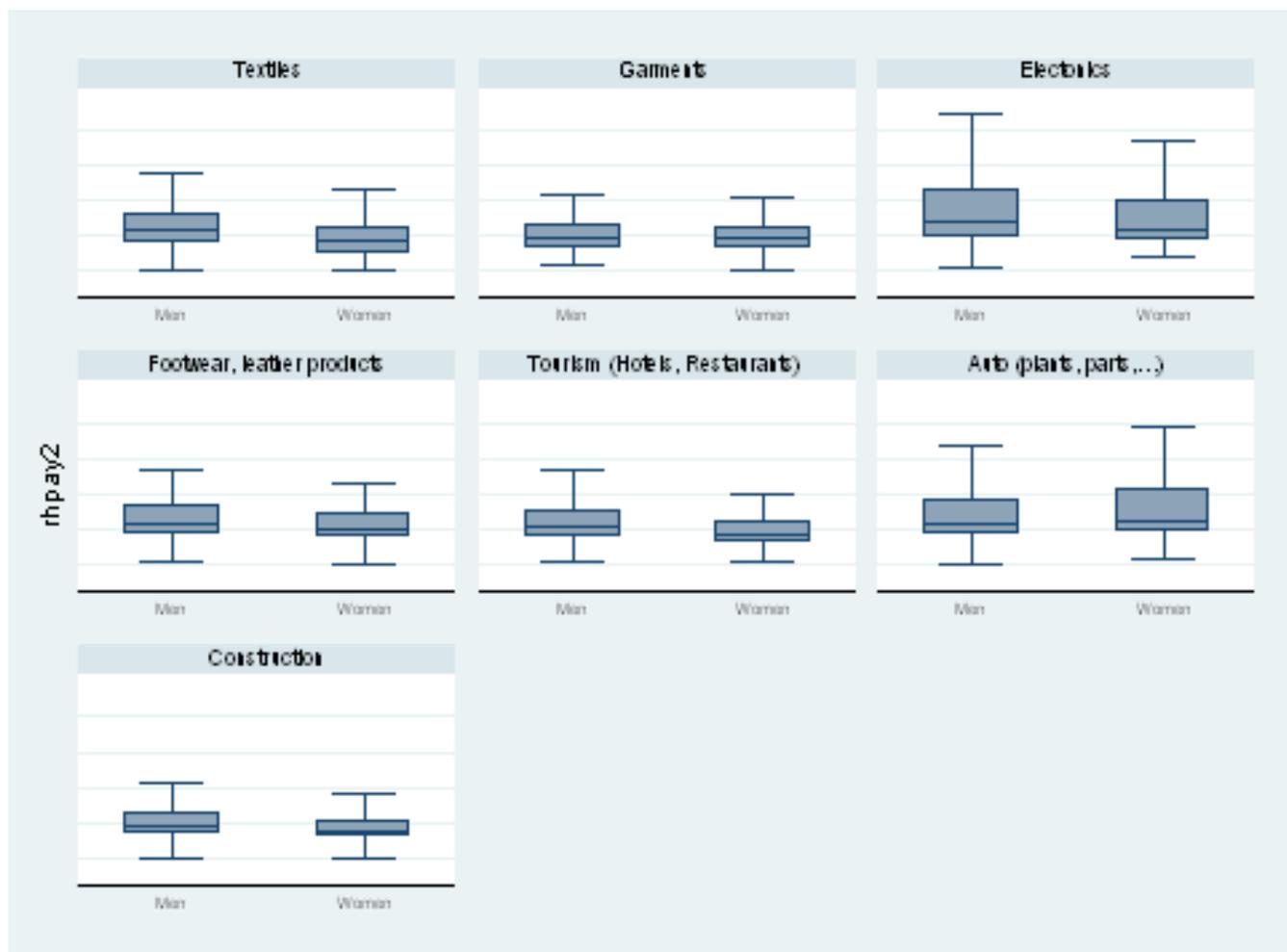


Chart 5: Philippines – Real hourly pay distribution of male and female workers in seven industries at risk (LFS 2005)

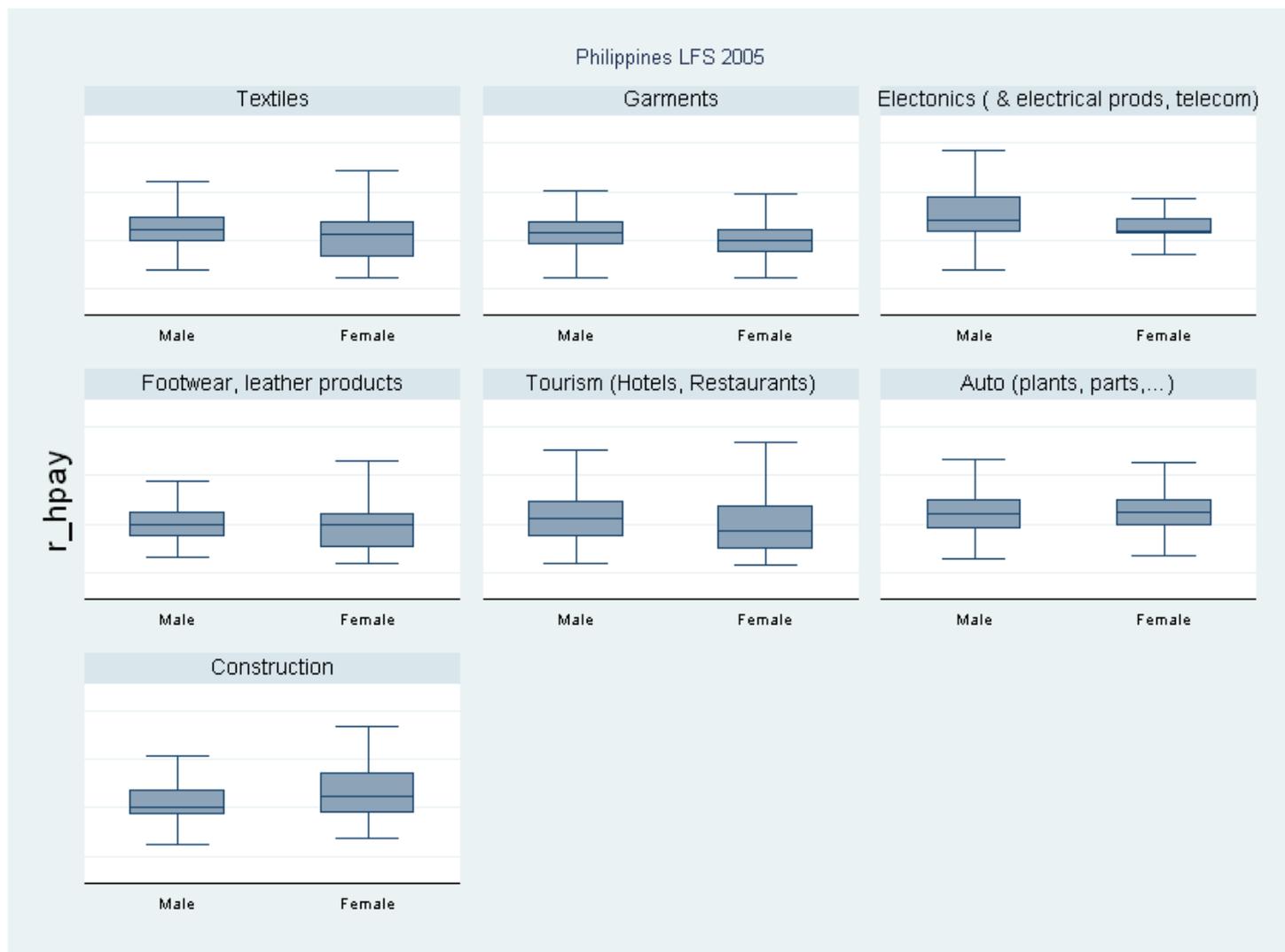


Chart 6: Vietnam – Real hourly pay distribution of male and female workers in seven industries (VLSMS 2004)



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News summaries:

Newspapers in the Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam were scanned and summaries were made by: Teresa Cruz, Mehnaz Haider, Parichart Srinopnikom, and Nguyen Thi Bich Thuy. Jessica Owens scanned websites of newspapers mainly for China, Indonesia, and more generally, Asia.