

# UNITARIAN WOMEN'S GROUP

## NEWSLETTER

May 2006

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## Editorial

Greetings! This will be my last proffering from the editorial chair and I shall be both sad and relieved to shed the responsibilities of office. The good news is that a vibrant younger woman, who is both highly creative and also computer literate, has offered to take over. Let me introduce Deeya Pavelle of the Hampstead congregation, your new editor, who can be reached at 93 Gilling Court, Belsize Grove, LONDON NW3 4XD and at her email address :-missmoon@blueyonder.co.uk. For her first issue we will work together and, no doubt, have the odd e-mail conference for a little while afterwards.

Those of you who attended the UWG conference at Great Hucklow in January will be aware that enormous changes were put in place. We now have a standing committee with a three year term of office consisting of the UWG administrator, Sue Cooper, the Membership Secretary, Helen Parsons, the Treasurer Stephanie Ramage, and the Newsletter editor, Margaret Hamer/Deeya Pavelle. Both Sue and Helen have been very busy on our account already. Sue was deeply involved in preparations for our slot the GA 2006, where Maggie Baxter spoke to enormous effect. In addition she has spent much time designing our eye-catching webpage for the UWG at: [www.unitariansocieties.org.uk/index.html](http://www.unitariansocieties.org.uk/index.html). Helen has built on the herculean labours at compiling a comprehensive membership list performed by Margaret Pyle and Sonya Richards two years ago and produced a valid list of 69 fully paid-up members, most of them contactable by email. For the first time some members will be receiving their copies of the current newsletter by email. And Stephanie has taken over the management of our finances from the ever-faithful Ruth Bowes, to whom we express our heartfelt thanks for all her patient and good-humoured stewardship over the years.

New faces, new officers, a new framework of organization...a generation on from the founding of the UWG we are moving into a structure of fully joined-up government, where the various aspects of our society – the annual conference, the profile slot at the GA, the newsletter, the connections with the wider movement and the general administration will finally cohere. Continuity will exist, areas of responsibility and interest be identified, and planning for change and new initiatives integrated into the pattern of the annual week-end conference. Hurrah! And we must also express our heartfelt thanks to the many sisters who have ensured our continued existence over the last two decades, some of whom are no longer able to attend our meetings.

\* \* \*

The current issue contains reports back from the General Assembly Meetings from our delegate, Judy Jerome, who proposed our –successful – motion on equal rights for women, together with the background paper she produced, and her account of Maggie Baxter's presentation in the UWG slot. That is followed by my account of the 2006 UWG annual conference at Great Hucklow. – If, dear readers, you have a sense of *déjà vu*, you are quite right. Some of these items will have appeared in 'The Inquirer', but their force will be reinforced by their new context. – The Moon Sisters of Golders Green share their experience in setting up a Women's Group, together with their groundrules. You will also find a very helpful article on the Essex Church Reading Group, together with a booklist, by Juliet Edwards, who has also provided a

delightful photograph of caryatids in Vienna (those powerful Greek females who carry the load of buildings on their heads!) Part of the very moving Chakra meditation used by Appleseed and Deeya at Hucklow is included – the second part will feature in the next issue. Finally, taking advantage of editorial privilege, I include a children's story I wrote and used in a service – I'm happy to say that the grown-ups enjoyed it also!

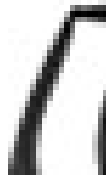
Believe it or not, there was such a wealth of material submitted that some will appear in our issue later this year. And, for the first time, many will be receiving this by email. Happy reading!

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## **Report to the Unitarian Women's Group On the 2006 General Assembly**

**Judy Jerome**  
UWG representative

**I**t is with elation, gratitude and to mention exhaustion). I am motion passed with flying these rumours were but there were were plans afoot to try and de-rail motion passed almost unanimously. abstentions and everyone else voted



joy that I write you this report. (Not happy to report that our UWG colours. I'm not sure how solid some whispers prior to GA that there our motion. It didn't happen. The There were two negative votes, five a solid YES!

This being my first GA, the whole experience was a bit of a trial by fire. Facing 300 people from a podium is not new to me, but given the rather adversarial climate of a 'For the Motion' microphone on the right and an 'Against the Motion' microphone on the left, it was nerve wracking to say the least. My introduction to the motion was written to balance the statistics and facts which comprised the background information which was sent to all the delegates. I recounted stories of young women, girls actually, who had been forced into unwanted marriage by their families, who had undergone genital cutting and who had been the victims of honour killings. It was rather difficult to hear, but most certainly, hearing is the first step to understanding. Bruce Chilton of the Octagon Chapel in Norwich provided the second although his statement wasn't made until after the final 'from the floor' pleas were. (I didn't see the green light go on and got red lighted rather abruptly when I was speaking). We owe heartfelt thanks to Bruce who agreed to second the motion at the eleventh hour, just two days prior to the GA. Having a man provide the second (not to mention a man of Bruce's stature) was tactically brilliant. Thanks, Colleen, for that idea.

*In no society on earth do  
women enjoy the same rights,  
access to resources, or  
economic opportunities as men.*

We correctly anticipated that the majority of objections would centre around that men are discriminated against as well. Actually, the delegate from Brixton listed the many minorities in his congregation which he felt faced discrimination. Also there was the fact that a rather imprecise motion about women had been passed in 1977 which I pre-empted in my intro and suggested that this current motion built upon that foundation. I also suggested that although there are 'isms' in the world today, this should not prevent us from loudly affirming this one under consideration. I would like to thank Ann Peart who not only encouraged her ministerial colleagues to support this motion but also spoke at the time in support and indicated that a single glance at the 'high table' would demonstrate that we Unitarians would do well to look at ourselves (the high table was ALL men). A very effective, gentle and subversive act, Anne! Well done!

Two days prior to the GA, I received an amended version of our motion which had been reviewed by the Steering Committee. Most of the suggested amendments had to do with formatting and bulleting. I actually agreed with them. So when I attended the motions workshop on Thursday, I was pleased to be able to say thanks and well done to the Committee. I have attached the new motion with the tracked changes left in for your information.

Our program, featuring Maggie Baxter, Executive Director of Womankind Worldwide, was also very well received. Maggie is a gem. I was very nervous about the audio visual equipment but all went well. I didn't count but I think our audience was about 50 people. I had prepared a flier which I handed out to all I encountered prior to our presentation.

Maggie guided us from country to country and outlined the variety of ways that oppression against women is evidenced. It was the Womankind story of Aberash from Ethiopia that comprised my introduction to our motion the following day. Her presentation was about strong women, in the face of unbelievable oppression, taking charge of their own lives. There were the clans in Somalia where clan disputes are

*Women do two thirds of the world's work, receive 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the means of production.*

settled with the gift of a daughter. Asher from Somalia now states that her only clan is feminism. Maggie had just returned from Afghanistan and the highlight of her presentation was when she produced a burkha and donned it in front of the audience. She did indeed become suddenly invisible. No face, no eyes.....no

person. On Sunday, during a break in the morning's business, the man I was sitting next to and whom I didn't know, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "It's all your fault, you know". What had I done this time, I asked, truly wondering what fine mess was I now into. He said, "All we can talk about is how that burkha made Maggie Baxter invisible. It made such an impression on both myself and my wife." I could only beam. It made all of our hard work worthwhile and it affirmed Womankind's mission: *One girl, one woman, one person at a time...thus change will come.*

A message to Ingrid Tavkar, “We missed you!” Healing wishes from us all. Thanks to Sheila Jones who wrote a wonderful article about our UWG presentation for the Zette.

On a less than satisfactory note, I was dismayed to discover that we were allocated an exhibit space and we had planned absolutely nothing to exhibit. In fact a table hadn't even been ordered so we had a 'black hole' with a single chair in the midst of all these other well ordered displays. I had actually created some handouts of our Concerns and our Registration Form which I deposited on the chair. I also 'procured' another chair and made the Womankind pamphlets available. A bit minimalist to be sure.

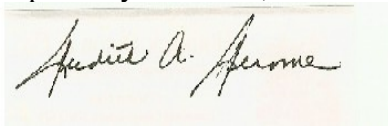
The rest of the conference was a whirl. I attended all of the business meetings and voted with confidence on behalf of our Unitarian Women's Group. Here are a few bullet points from the conference in general:

- All four motions which were presented were passed;
- A simple but moving ceremony by the new Executive Committee affirmed their willingness to assume the responsibility for governance;
- An inspirational worship ceremony by the young people who successfully led a spiral dance for the entire group;
- A lovely anniversary service in spite of being exiled from Chester Cathedral.

Some suggestions for subsequent year representatives:

- Obtain the banner prior to the conference, if possible. It folds easily and whoever has it can easily post it in a jiffy bag;
- Work ahead of time on a display and start collecting the contents early;
- Write a Zette article ahead of time about the UWG and then dress it up with content from our program;
- Have a helper to share the load (a special thanks to Anne Bodman, who made all of the arrangements for Maggie Baxter);
- Network with other UWG women who may be attending and publicise the sponsored event collectively. Distribute fliers ahead of the event;
- If audio visual equipment is needed, seek additional support on an as needed basis ahead of time;
- Relax and enjoy!

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Judith A. Sperone", written in dark ink on a light-colored rectangular piece of paper.

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***Motion***  
***To the General Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christians***

***2006***

*An Affirmation of Equal Rights for Women*

*Proposed by the Unitarian Women's Group*  
*Authored by Moon Sisters of Golders Green Unitarians*

Unitarianism recognises and promotes the worth and dignity of all people, which includes the equal rights of men and women, and furthermore proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal and are entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, including any distinction as to sex.

*It further recognises that* discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and thus promotes the full participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of society, and

*furthermore,* the cause of peace and the welfare of the world requires the full participation of all people, both men and women.

*Be it resolved* that all appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure that women, married or unmarried, have equal rights with men in all areas of economic, social and political life and that women are equal partners with men in determining the values, direction and governance of their societies for the benefit of all.

As a first step, all Congregations, District Associations and Affiliated Societies should undertake an audit of all their activities to ensure that women are enabled to participate fully and equally in all areas.

Signatory,

Judith A. Jerome, as authorised by the Unitarian Women's Group  
Annual General Meeting  
19 February, 2006  
Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow

*[This is the original wording, subsequently revised at the GA. See the Inquirer for further details.]*



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### **The Annual Conference of the Unitarian Women's Group, 2006**

Members of the Unitarian Women's Group left their annual conference weekend with a smile on their lips and a song in their hearts. They had achieved the impossible. A full and enjoyable programme of personal development and meditation had been run in tandem with a complete revision of the organisational structure of the group. A significant number of new members had joined, which had the effect of lowering the average age, and a programme of activities had been identified for the next twelve months. Small wonder then that female voices rang out lustily during the excellent Sunday morning service given by David Shaw in The Old Chapel. Anglo-American relationships had been cemented, new directions of interest identified, and we had included the editor of *The Inquirer* herself amongst those present.

Deeya Pavelle and Appleseed Robinson were jointly responsible for the theme of the Individual Woman's Need to Love and Accept herself. The title as published – 'Imagine a Unitarian Woman in Love with Herself' – had revealed a chasm in cross-cultural understanding. To British ears this seemed to signify a licence for narcissistic indulgence, most definitely at odds with the Unitarian concern for social justice. But our American colleagues convinced us that, for them, the issue was that of self-knowledge and self-realisation, the essential precursors to the development of a mature response to the needs of others. Workshops combined reviews of personal history with guided meditations, a labyrinth walk, and the creation of a group collage, - the last no easy task with over twenty highly individualistic artists. And although some activities were not unfamiliar to us, the cumulative effect was both refreshing and inspirational. The organisers had prepared both their materials and sequencing with great care, and conducted us throughout the course with an engaging blend of humour and gravitas, demonstrating an admirable flexibility in tailoring

activities to the time slots available. Appropriately, a communal apple-feast rounded off the weekend – and yet no discord followed!

Several hours subsequently were given over to animated debate about the identity and organisational structure of the UWG, an affiliated society of the G A for the past twenty-four years. Changes in governance are very topical in Unitarian circles at present and it was thought that the UWG needed to take greater advantage of the internet and the possibilities of rapid communication available. Annual planning of key activities such as the residential weekend, the publication of the newsletter and the slot at the General Assembly should aim for much greater integration and more effective publicity. A steering group of four women, to be elected for not more than three years at a time and consisting of the treasurer, the membership secretary, the newsletter editor and the general administrator, would seek to co-ordinate activities and give advice when appropriate. Old-timers present took heart from the enthusiasm, enterprise and commitment of the newcomers.

Various key decisions were reached. A motion will go forward to the 2006 G A restating the issue of equal rights for women, which will be proposed by our delegate, Judy Jerome. The outline programme for next year's conference was agreed. Having contributed several hundred pounds over the past two years towards Barbara Smith's work for education in Meghalaya, members voted to donate £150, the sum realised by the silent auction, to the embryonic BUYAN group (British Unitarian Young Adult Network), after hearing Sarah Atkinson's very eloquent plea for the project. And when Ruth Bowes, our Treasurer for years past counting, indicated that she wished to stand down, many tributes were freely voiced for her sterling work and good-humoured unflappability. Stephanie Ramage will take over as her successor.

With characteristic professionalism, David Shaw, Lay Leader of the Old Chapel, had taken account of our themes in planning his morning service. If our spirits were high beforehand, we left Hucklow walking on air, impatient that another year must pass before we meet again in this green heartland of Unitarianism

Margaret Hamer.

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Moon Sisters  
Unitarian Women's Group  
Golders Green Unitarians  
Autumn, 2004

## Groundrules

*Sharing*, in this way, means the voluntary disclosure of information or feelings. It is a gift, freely given, which hasn't been obtained through coercion or the use of power. To share in this way conveys the message that the person who is talking feels safe and accepted by the group with whom she is choosing to share.



We decided that, because everyone is so busy and leads such very active lives, there be a solid beginning and ending time, for example, 7.30 to 9.30. This makes planning each of our meetings easier. The first hour will be devoted to personal sharing where each woman has a chance to touch base with the group and share how her life was during the past week. We will agree on the same amount of time, perhaps five minutes, and then proceed around the group in a circle. In order for personal sharing to happen successfully the following is suggested:

- When a woman shares, this is solely her time to talk. Everyone else in the group should assume the role of attentive listener and should attend in a loving and careful way to the speaker. The speaker has the option of requesting feedback and/or suggestions....or not. If the speaker requests no feedback, then everyone else in the group simply listens.
- Listening is active participation. Being an empathic recipient of someone's thoughts and feelings means that we both physically, mentally and spiritually are *with* that person. That we are not trying to think of what next to say ourselves or to anticipate what that person is going to say next.
- The listening should be **non-judgmental at all times**. That is to say that the reality being expressed by the speaker is indeed her reality and is truth for that person. We have no right to label or judge either the person or what is being spoken. This is the basis for building trust and security and should be the basis for all communication that happens within the group.
- The agreed upon amount of time for personal sharing should be respected by the speaker. If someone needs additional time because of a particular life crisis or situation, it can be requested at the beginning of the meeting. It may be that many people will not need their entire five minutes.
- Everyone has the option of passing and not sharing at all if that is where she is on that particular evening.
- Everything that is said during our time together is unconditionally confidential.
- We will have an opening and closing at the beginning and end of each of our meetings. We feel that this provides focus and closure that can be both comforting and helpful.
- We have determined that the maximum size of our group will be twelve women with a waiting list maintained for others that will want to join.
- We will always respect each others boundaries and for those who may be struggling to articulate a thought or feeling, we will assist if requested.

The personal sharing time will probably take about an hour or a little less with the following hour being allocated to a predetermined discussion topic. The discussion hour can be a little less formal than the preceding hour. Although comments don't necessarily need to be solicited in an 'around the circle' way, the basic framework for the discussion should still be governed by respect for whomever is speaking and for

what is being said. Which doesn't mean that we necessarily agree on everything. Someone said (a Unitarian, I think), "If we disagree in love, nothing can hurt us." This can be articulated in a meaningful, loving and respectful way.

Knowing that our focus is to provide mutual support and consistent and heartfelt sharing, we affirm that we all need to make an intentional commitment to attend the meetings when we join. This consistency is necessary for the trust that is being built as we grow in our group both individually and collectively.

Everyone within the group is equal. No one has more or less power than anyone else. We empower ourselves to attend our meetings and to accept the humanity of each woman in the group. That is to say, we all have our doubts and our convictions, and our fears and our aspirations. And we all deserve for ourselves and offer for others the respect that we are all due.



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14 August, 2004

*Dear Aria, Rose, Arati and Anne,*

Although we are still enjoying the warm weather of summer, we are reaching that point where we are looking forward to the crisp whispers of autumn. We are in fact over a week past the traditional astrological date of Aug 6th which was designated by the ancient Britons as 'Lugnasadh', changed by the early Christians to Lammas. Lammas means 'loaf-mass', for this was the day on which loaves of bread were baked from the first grain harvest and laid on the church altars as offerings. It was a day representative of 'first fruits' and early harvest. In other words, we are turning our hearts and minds to the harvest of autumn and the darkness of the coming winter.

It is within this state of soulfulness, that I have been thinking about our GGU Womens' Group which we have all been looking forward to commencing. I feel that it is time for us to begin. I have reserved the church for the date of **Friday, 24 September** for our initial meeting. It will be an opportunity for us to discuss our hopes and aspirations for our group.



I had volunteered to organise this group only because I have been a member of a Womens' Group in my Unitarian church back in the US since 1981. We met weekly on Wednesday evenings and had even named our group 'Evenings Beyond Eve.' When I came to this country, I assisted in the start of a Womens' Group at the Octagon Chapel in Norwich which is still meeting. I did a search through my archives and was actually able to retrieve a couple of the documents which we wrote when we formed the Octagon group. The first were what we called some basic groundrules and they were articulated only after thoughtful and caring discussion. They can be a good starting point for us as well. Not that I feel that we should adopt them. Oh no! Only that they provide a good place for our conversation to begin. The second document is a short article which I wrote for the Octagon newsletter when we were trying to interest other women in joining. Both documents are enclosed in this mailing.

Our small group is at this point in time comprised of the five of us. We are Aria Datta, Rose Williams, Anne Bodman, Arati Banerji and myself. My contact details are at the top of this letter and I always respond to emails. Perhaps at our first meeting we can discuss the best way to stay in touch with each other. I am also copying this to Feergus on this one occasion just to keep him in the loop at this initial organisational stage. The date again is: **Friday evening, 24 September at 7.30.** I hope that you will be able to attend.

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### ***Reading Engagement Group***

Our reading engagement group has been running once a month since June 2003. We had our 25th meeting in September 2005 and Patricia Walker-Hesson gathered together all the books we had read up to that point so we could take a photo (below). Members picked out their favourites and wrote a little about them to use in a piece for the newsletter. A photograph of the group and the collected books also featured in 'The Inquirer' to illustrate an article on engagement groups.

Members of the group take turns in choosing a small selection of books from which the rest of the group select one to read and talk about together. Attendance is generally at the level of around five regular members, though we are occasionally pleasantly surprised to be joined by someone else who has found out about us, either through the website or the newsletter. The group has a relaxed atmosphere and newcomers are welcome to come along and join us. This group is co-facilitated by Patricia Walker-Hesson and Jane Blackall.



*A few members of the reading engagement group:  
Jennifer Rowland, Patricia Walker-Hesson, Caroline Blair and Juliet Edwards along with all 25 books we had read by  
September 2005, our chalice and a celebration cake.*

Juliet Edwards wrote the following piece about our book group for the Unitarian Women's Group newsletter in March 2006:

*"Isn't it strange that a book which we thought wasn't all that well written has stimulated a really interesting discussion."*

*We were talking about 'According to Mary' by Marianne Fredriksson. It's a novel in which an ageing Mary Magdalene remembers Jesus' ministry. To be fair it could well have been a translation which did not do justice to its Swedish author.*

*Our Reading Engagement Group at Essex Church, Kensington, has been holding its monthly meetings for over two years now. I have doubled the number of books that I read in a year. All of us have read authors who are new to us. We take it in turn to recommend a book. We have made it a rule that at least one of the group has to have read the book chosen so that we don't end up with a dud. For instance I wanted to read George Eliot's 'Silas Marner' (I tend to like to get the classics under my belt) and Patricia said that she had read it, so it became my choice for the month. It led to an interesting discussion about child care and about being a child.*

*There have been a number of relevant up-to-date choices. 'The Bookseller of Kabul' by Asne Seierstad, 'The Kite Runner' by Khaled Hosseini are both about Afghanistan and 'Crescent' by Diana Abu Jaber is about an Iraqi-American woman who works as a cook in a cafe in Los Angeles. The descriptions of the aromatic foods she prepares are marvellous.*

*Almost all of the books we have chosen have been novels but they don't have to be and mostly the people who attend are women but the group is open to all. Because it's an engagement group it always begins with a reading and candle lighting and finishes with closing words. We are reminded to be in 'right relationship' with one another and so each person can depend on being listened to.*

## **Books we've tackled since June 2003...**

*"An Evil Cradling" by Brian Keenan  
"Journal of a Solitude" by May Sarton  
"Theo's Odyssey" by Catherine Clement  
"Making History" by Stephen Fry  
"The Kite Runner" by Khaled Hosseini  
"The Dispossessed" by Ursula Le Guin*

*"The Saddlebag"* by Babiyiyh Nakhjavani  
*"The Matisse Stories"* by A.S. Byatt  
*"The Outsider"* by Albert Camus  
*"Anne Hughes: Her Boke"* Edited by Mollie Preston  
*"The God of Small Things"* by Arundhati Roy  
*"Refuge"* by Terry Tempest Williams  
*"Mr. Golightly's Holiday"* by Salley Vickers  
*"The Little Prince"* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery  
*"Where Angels Fear to Tread"* by E.M. Forster  
*"The Knitting Sutra"* by Susan G. Lydon  
*"Crescent"* by Diana Abu-Jaber  
*"Toast"* by Nigel Slater  
*"According to Mary"* by Marianne Fredriksson  
*"Silas Marner"* by George Eliot  
*"The Bookseller of Kabul"* by Asne Seierstad  
*"Astonishing Splashes of Colour"* by Clare Morall  
*"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"* by Mark Haddon  
*"Brick Lane"* by Monica Ali  
*"Burmese Days"* by George Orwell  
*"The Woman Warrior"* by Maxine Hong Kingston  
*"Hotel World"* by Ali Smith  
*"Prodigal Summer"* by Barbara Kingsolver  
*"Life of Pi"* by Yann Martel  
*"Buddha Da"* by Anne Donovan

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## **Women and the world economy**

### **A guide to womenomics**

Apr 12th 2006

From The Economist print edition



## The future of the world economy lies increasingly in female hands

"WHY can't a woman be more like a man?" mused Henry Higgins in "My Fair Lady". Future generations might ask why a man can't be more like a woman. In rich countries, girls now do better at school than boys, more women are getting university degrees than men are and females are filling most new jobs. Arguably, women are now the most powerful engine of global growth.

In 1950 only one-third of American women of working age had a paid job. Today two-thirds do, and women make up almost half of America's workforce (see chart 1). Since 1950 men's employment rate has slid by 12 percentage points, to 77%. In fact, almost everywhere more women are employed and the percentage of men with jobs has fallen—although in some countries the feminisation of the workplace still has far to go: in Italy and Japan, women's share of jobs is still 40% or less.

The increase in female employment in developed countries has been aided by a big shift in the type of jobs on offer. Manufacturing work, traditionally a male preserve, has declined, while jobs in services have expanded. This has reduced the demand for manual labour and put the sexes on a more equal footing.

In the developing world, too, more women now have paid jobs. In the emerging East Asian economies, for every 100 men in the labour force there are now 83 women, higher even than the average in OECD countries. Women have been particularly important to the success of Asia's export industries, typically accounting for 60-80% of jobs in many export sectors, such as textiles and clothing.



Women on  
Share of US em

Of course, it is misleading to talk of women's "entry" into the workforce. Besides formal employment, women have always worked in the home, looking after children, cleaning or cooking, but because this is unpaid, it is not counted in the official statistics. To some extent, the increase in female paid employment has meant fewer hours of unpaid housework. However, the value of housework has fallen by much less than the time spent on it, because of the increased productivity afforded by dishwashers, washing machines and so forth. Paid nannies and cleaners employed by working women now also do some work that used to belong in the non-market economy.

Nevertheless, most working women are still responsible for the bulk of chores in their homes. In developed economies, women produce just under 40% of official GDP. But if the worth of housework is added (valuing the hours worked at the average wage rates of a home help or a nanny) then women probably produce slightly more than half of total output.

The increase in female employment has also accounted for a big chunk of global growth in recent decades. GDP growth can come from three sources: employing more people; using more capital per worker; or an increase in the productivity of labour and capital due to new technology, say. Since 1970 women have filled two new jobs for every one taken by a man. Back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that the employment of extra women has not only added more to GDP than new jobs for men but has also chipped in more than either capital investment or increased productivity. Carve up the world's economic growth a different way and another surprising conclusion emerges: over the past decade or so, the increased employment of women in developed economies has contributed much more to global growth than China has.

## **Girl power**

Women are becoming more important in the global marketplace not just as workers, but also as consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors. Women have traditionally done most of the household shopping, but now they have more money of their own to spend. Surveys suggest that women make perhaps 80% of consumers' buying decisions—from health care and homes to furniture and food.

Kathy Matsui, chief strategist at Goldman Sachs in Tokyo, has devised a basket of 115 Japanese companies that should benefit from women's rising purchasing power and changing lives as more of them go out to work. It includes industries such as financial services as well as online retailing, beauty, clothing and prepared foods. Over the past decade the value of shares in Goldman's basket has risen by 96%, against the Tokyo stockmarket's rise of 13%.

Women's share of the workforce has a limit. In America it has already stalled. But there will still be a lot of scope for women to become more productive as they make better use of their qualifications. At school, girls consistently get better grades, and in most developed countries well over half of all university degrees are now being awarded to women. In America 140 women enrol in higher education each year for every 100 men; in Sweden the number is as high as 150. (There are, however, only 90 female Japanese students for every 100 males.)

In years to come better educated women will take more of the top jobs. At present, for example, in Britain more women than men train as doctors and lawyers, but relatively few are leading surgeons or partners in law firms. The main reason why women still get paid less on average than men is not that they are paid less for the same jobs but that they tend not to climb so far up the career ladder, or they choose lower-paid occupations, such as nursing and teaching. This pattern is likely to change.

## **The fairer and the fitter**

Making better use of women's skills is not just a matter of fairness. Plenty of studies suggest that it is good for business, too. Women account for only 7% of directors on the world's corporate boards—15% in America, but less than 1% in Japan. Yet a study by Catalyst, a consultancy, found that American companies with more women in senior management jobs earned a higher return on equity than those with fewer women at the top. This might be because mixed teams of

men and women are better than single-sex groups at solving problems and spotting external threats. Studies have also suggested that women are often better than men at building teams and communicating.

To make men feel even worse, researchers have also concluded that women make better investors than they do. A survey by Digital Look, a British financial website, found that women consistently earn higher returns than men. A survey of American investors by Merrill Lynch examined why women were better at investing. Women were less likely to “churn” their investments; and men tended to commit too much money to single, risky ideas. Overconfidence and overtrading are a recipe for poor investment returns.

Despite their gains, women remain perhaps the world's most under-utilised resource. Many are still excluded from paid work; many do not make best use of their skills. Take Japan, where only 57% of women work, against 65% in America (see chart 2). Greater participation by women in the labour market could help to offset the effects of an ageing, shrinking population and hence support growth. Ms Matsui reckons that if Japan raised the share of working women to American levels, it would boost annual growth by 0.3 percentage points over 20 years.

The same argument applies to continental Europe. Less than 50% of Italian women and only 55-60% of German and French women have paid jobs. But Kevin Daly, of Goldman Sachs, points out that among women aged 25-29 the participation rate in the EU (ie, the proportion of women who are in jobs or looking for them) is the same as in America. Among 55- to 59-year-olds it is only 50%, well below America's 66%. Over time, female employment in Europe will surely rise, to the benefit of its economies.

In poor countries too, the under-utilisation of women stunts economic growth. A study last year by the World Economic Forum found a clear correlation between sex equality (measured by economic participation, education, health and political empowerment) and GDP per head. Correlation does not prove the direction of causation. But other studies also suggest that inequality between the sexes harms long-term growth.

In particular, there is strong evidence that educating girls boosts prosperity. It is probably the single best investment that can be made in the developing world. Not only are better educated women more productive, but they raise healthier, better educated children. There is huge potential to raise income per head in developing countries, where fewer girls go to school than boys. More than two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women.

It is sometimes argued that it is shortsighted to get more women into paid employment. The more women go out to work, it is said, the fewer children there will be and the lower growth will be in the long run. Yet the facts suggest



**Jobs for the  
Female employer  
2004**

**Denmark**



otherwise. Chart 3 shows that countries with high female labour participation rates, such as Sweden, tend to have higher fertility rates than Germany, Italy and Japan, where fewer women work. Indeed, the decline in fertility has been greatest in several countries where female employment is low.

It seems that if higher female labour participation is supported by the right policies, it need not reduce fertility. To make full use of their national pools of female talent, governments need to remove obstacles that make it hard for women to combine work with having children. This may mean offering parental leave and child care, allowing more flexible working hours, and reforming tax and social-security systems that create disincentives for women to work.

Countries in which more women have stayed at home, namely Germany, Japan and Italy, offer less support for working mothers. This means that fewer women take or look for jobs; but it also means lower birth rates because women postpone childbearing. Japan, for example, offers little support for working mothers: only 13% of children under three attend day-care centres, compared with 54% in America and 34% in Britain.

Despite the increased economic importance of women, they could become more important still: more of them could join the labour market and more could make full use of their skills and qualifications. This would provide a sounder base for long-term growth. It would help to finance rich countries' welfare states as populations age and it would boost incomes in the developing world. However, if women are to get out and power the global economy, it is surely only fair that men should at last do more of the housework.



## A Mythic Tale

Long, long ago, when the world was young and spirits often visited the earth there lived a family of four spirit children, all born in the same instant, so that no-one was first and no-one last but all were equal. Their lives were happy and carefree until the time of testing drew near (for spirits, like human children, must endure a time of trials set by their elders, if they are to become wise).

So their parents said to them, "Each of you must journey alone into the great wide world in search of wisdom. You must live amongst the people there and learn their ways. And when you have discovered what it is they hold most dear, you may return to us, bearing with you a token of what you have discovered".

The first spirit flew far to the north until he came to the Land of Ice and Snow, where it was always winter and the breath froze as soon as it left the mouth. All the people

huddled together in their snow houses, shivering under their heavy furs. And he dwelt amongst them for many moons. “What is it that you value most in all this white world?” he asked them finally. “The warm red flame of fire”, they replied, “that is what we hold most dear”. So the spirit thanked them and bade them farewell, after he had caused fire to burn bright in their homes.

The second spirit flew east to the Land of the Burning Sun, where the ground was scorched and cracked and burnt the feet when they touched it. All living things strove in vain to escape the sun’s blistering rays. And she lived among the slow, exhausted people for many moons. “What is it that you long for most?” she asked them finally. “Cool water to quench our thirst and shady trees to shelter us”, they replied. So the spirit thanked them and caused a great river to flow unceasingly through their dusty world.

The third spirit flew far to the west until he came to the Land of Rocks and Mountains, where there are no trees and only stones multiply, and the people are bent and hollow-eyed. And he shared their hard existence for many moons. “What is it that you yearn for most?” he asked them finally. “A patch of fertile earth where our crops may grow. Then we can feed ourselves and our children will dance for joy”, they replied. So the spirit thanked them and caused a vast green plain to appear at the feet of the barren grey mountains.

The fourth spirit flew far to the south until she reached the Domain of the people of the Ever-Moving Sea, who lived on boats and rafts on the shimmering, shifting waves that were never still. And she lived amongst those people for many moons, eating the fishes and the weeds of the sea as they did. “What is your heart’s desire?” she asked them finally. “Oh! That sometimes we might escape from these eternally restless waves and live still and safe on dry land,” they replied. So the spirit thanked them and summoned a kind wind to blow them ashore to some fruitful islands.

Then the time came for the four spirit children to return to their own world to present what they had found to the greater spirits. The first one said, “My token from the people of frost and snow is a fiery flame”. And the second one said, “My token from the people of the burning sun is a drop of fresh water”. And the third one said, “My token from the people of the rocks and mountains is a growing shoot.” And the fourth one said, “My token from the people of the ever-moving sea is this!” And she breathed out a puff of air.

There was great rejoicing throughout the world of the spirits at the return of the young four who were now full-grown and truly wise. And from that time on it was accepted that earth, air, fire and water were the things that humankind held most dear and that each element was watched over by its very own guardian spirit.

Margaret Hamer