

The Numbers Speak for Themselves

Women and Economic Decision-Making

Economic decisions affect the lives of all people. Globalization, the opening of markets and the deregulation of industries have significant impacts on businesses, employees and families all over the world. Women, who comprise a majority of the world's poor, are at particular risk when it comes to global economic policy-making.

Yet of all policy-making areas, economics and finance are those in which women have the lowest levels of representation. For example, there are only 28 female ministers worldwide holding economy related portfolios—Finance, Economics, Trade, Development, Industry and Agriculture. Women are much more likely to be concentrated in the so-called soft domains, such as Education and Health, Social Affairs, and Human Resources.

What are the consequences of male domination in the economic arena? Women's interests, experiences and concerns are often rendered invisible or inadequately voiced in decision-making, effectively excluding them from key decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families and communities. It also means that the majority of the monetary, financial and trade policies being implemented worldwide—including Structural Adjustment Programs—are gender blind, resulting in serious economic costs to society as a whole.

Research has shown that when women are represented in critical mass they are able to influence policy outcomes. This has been the case in political decision-making where, through targeted structural reforms such as political party and government quotas and NGO training programs, more women are entering government. But despite these gains the numbers continue to remain low—women hold only a 14 percent combined average of seats in national legislatures.

Internationally, governments recognize that women's under-representation in decision-making, including economic decision-making, is not acceptable. In the Platform for Action launched at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, governments agreed that: "In order to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, women and men must participate fully and equally in the formulation of macroeconomic and social policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty (Para. 47)."

Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a legally binding instrument adopted in 1979 and currently ratified by over 168 countries, stipulate that State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that women are on equal terms with men.

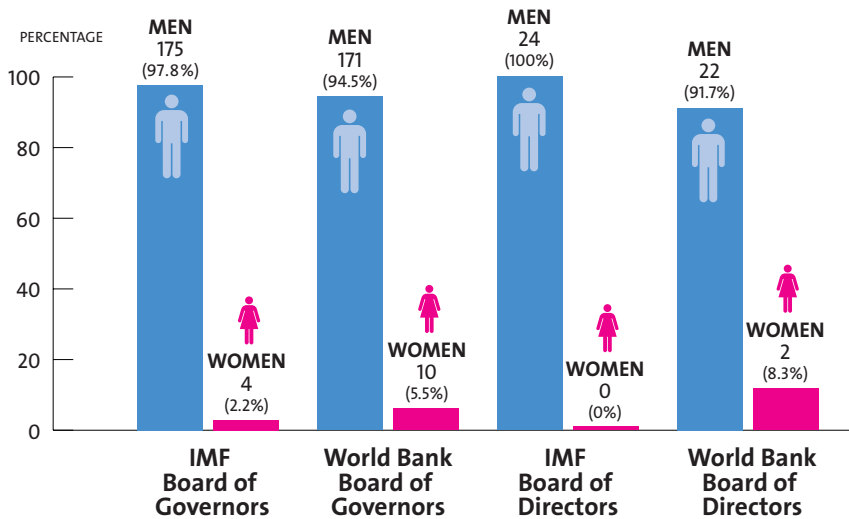
Article 13 of the same document calls for measures to eliminate discrimination against women in economic and social arenas, including equal rights to family benefits, bank loans and other forms of financial credit. Article 14 focuses on the particular problems of rural women and the significant roles they play in the economic survival of their families.

As part of its ongoing 50/50 campaign to promote gender balance in decision-making, based on a belief that women can make a difference in policy outcomes, WEDO has reviewed women's representation in the decision-making structures of the major global financial institutions—the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, relevant United Nations bodies and Regional Banks. The numbers speak for themselves.



Gender Breakdown of Boards of Governors and Boards of Directors at World Financial Institutions*

In the IMF and World Bank, the Board of Governors is made up of senior economic government officials, such as Ministers of Finance and Central Bank heads, with each member country represented. The Board of Directors is the chief decision-making body within each of the IMF and World Bank. In practice, the Board of Directors' delegated powers make it the primary policy-making body in each organization.



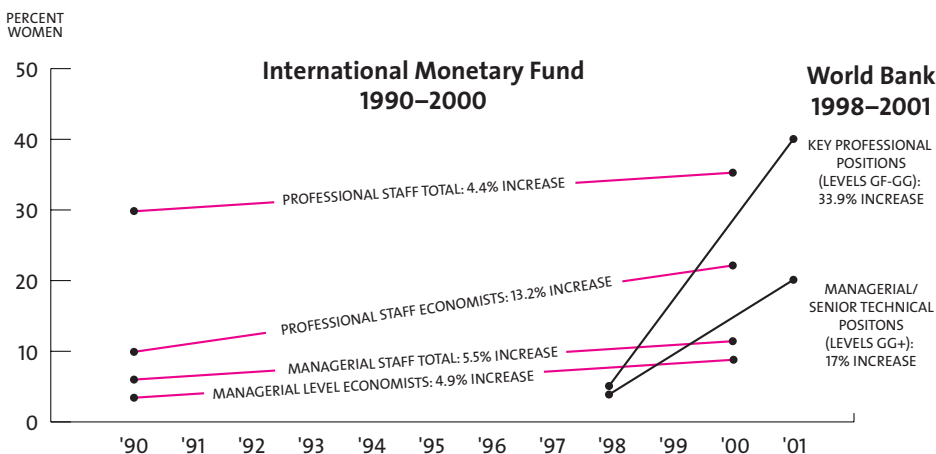
* Boards are appointed by national governments. At the IMF, women comprise 6.3% of alternates to the Board of Governors, and 4.2% of alternates to the Board of Directors. At the World Bank, women comprise 9% of alternates to the Board of Governors, and 16.7% of alternates to the Board of Directors.

Despite WEDO's repeated inquiries, the WTO could not provide comparable data to the above.

What we do know is that, of the 159 trade policy experts selected in 1998 for the WTO roster of dispute, the body that settles trade related disagreements, 12 out of 159 (7.5 percent) were women. Of the country representatives who attended the fourth WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Doha, Qatar in November 2001, 8.4 percent were women.

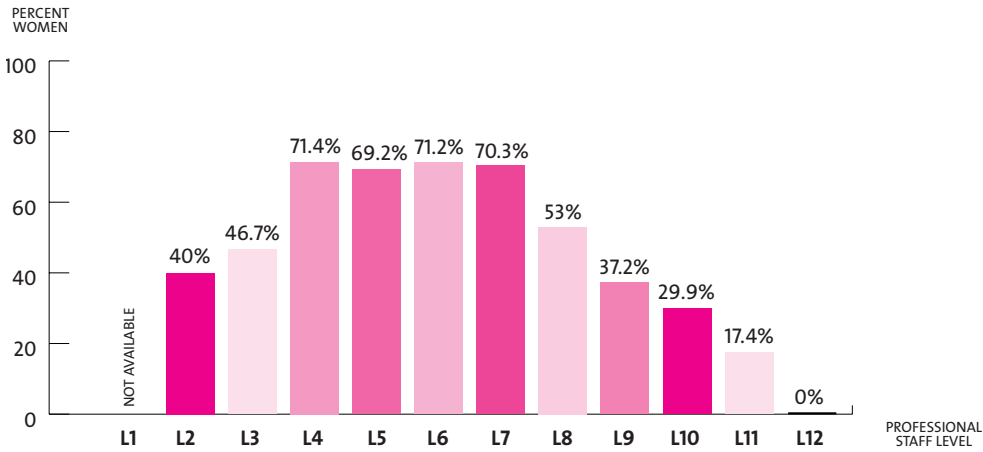
Progress in Gender Equity in Staff at the IMF and World Bank

Some progress has been made at the staff level, where women's representation has increased over the last ten years.



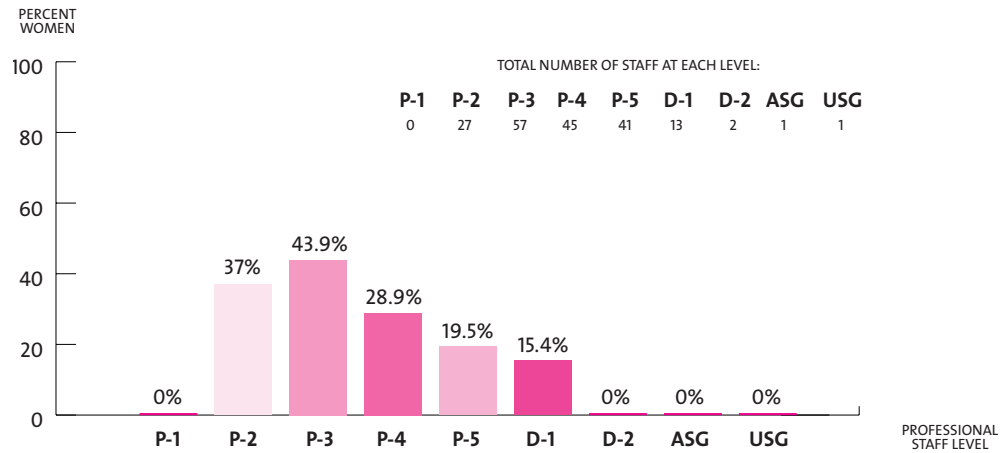
Women in Professional Staff Levels of the World Trade Organization

Women form more than half (51.9 percent) of all professional staff (levels L1 to L12), yet are clearly under-represented at top levels where, for example, the Director General and four Deputy Directors General are all men.



Women in the Staff of the United Nations*

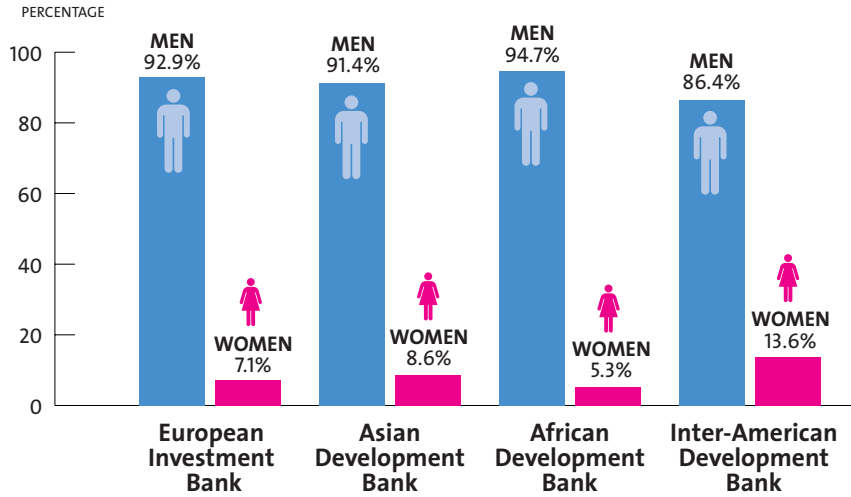
In the United Nation's principal economic agency, UNCTAD, 31 percent of staff are women. However, at the higher levels, women's representation declines and there are no women in the top four positions.



*Of the five regional Economic Commissions, there is one woman head.
Between 28.7 and 36.8 percent of staff on the five regional commissions are women.

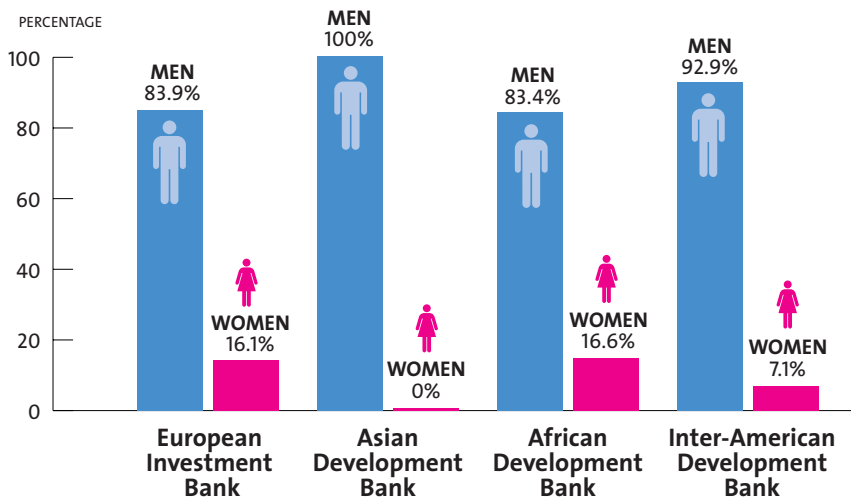
Gender Breakdown of Boards of Governors at Regional Development Banks *

Women's representation is also low in the regional development banks, which are principle sources of multilateral financing for development projects aimed at reducing poverty.



*Boards are appointed by national governments. Women comprise 6.9% of Board of Governors alternates at the Asian Development Bank, 10.8% at the African Development Bank, and 15.5% at the Inter-American Development Bank.

Gender Breakdown of Boards of Directors at Regional Development Banks *



*Boards are appointed by national governments. Women comprise 16.7% of Board of Directors alternates at the Asian Development Bank, 11.7% at the African Development Bank, and 7.7% at the Inter-American Development Bank.