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WOMEN,SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

BY

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By
Swarna Jayaweera

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, women in Sri Lanka have been producers in fields and in domestic industries. With the growth of a commercial economy, industrial capitalism and the development of the infrastructure of a modern state, new economic activities have been generated and earlier forms of on-the-job and apprenticeship training have been overshadowed by institutional skill development. The access of women to skill development programmes, and thereby to employment, affects both national development and the life chances of women.

Given the demand for, and supply of female labour, access to and the outcome of programmes are affected by the social construction of gender. Therefore this paper argues that policies and programmes for training and employment should specifically address these issues of gender imbalances.

The demand for skills by the economy and the capacity of the economy to absorb the output of educational and training systems determine the degree of employment and unemployment and the success of skill development programmes. The demand for female labour is affected by the perception of women as only secondary earners despite the reality of their crucial economic contribution. Women are used as low-cost and dispensable labour in the international division of labour that has relocated labour-intensive industries in economically developing countries, to the extent that factories in the export processing zones and subcontracting industries are heavily dependent on their "nimble fingers".

The gender division of labour within and outside the household is influenced by traditional patriarchal attitudes and by imported western norms of domesticity that obfuscates the perceptions of local policy-makers of the role of women in the economy. The concept of the male breadwinner and the dependent housewife contributes to the invisibility of women as economic producers in the traditional peasant sector and in the urban informal sector. It has also marginalized them in skill development programmes. Perceptions of women as secondary or supplementary earners also tend to confine the majority of women to the lower levels of the employment hierarchy without access to opportunities for skill training and upward mobility. Acceptance of a norm of gender-appropriate economic activities limits the range of training and employment opportunities available to women. Although the dual labour market theory underscores the segmentation of the labour market into a high wage, primary segment and a low wage, secondary segment (Barron and Norris, 1976) the interface of class and gender is seen in the demarcation on gender lines within each segment.

The supply of skills is partly determined by the formal and non-formal education system. Despite the popularity of human capital theories (e.g. Schultz, 1963), education *per se* plays only a secondary role in employment. Nevertheless, vocational education and training operate as an intermediate agency between general education and the labour market. The distribution of skills by the vocational education system tends to be determined by the gender division of labour. The function of the education system as an instrument of socio-economic mobility (Halsey *et al.*, 1980) is limited therefore by the role of education as an agent of social and cultural reproduction (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; C. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Berstein, 1971). In this process education also reproduces gender role stereotypes that affect training and the social relations of production (Macdonald, 1980).

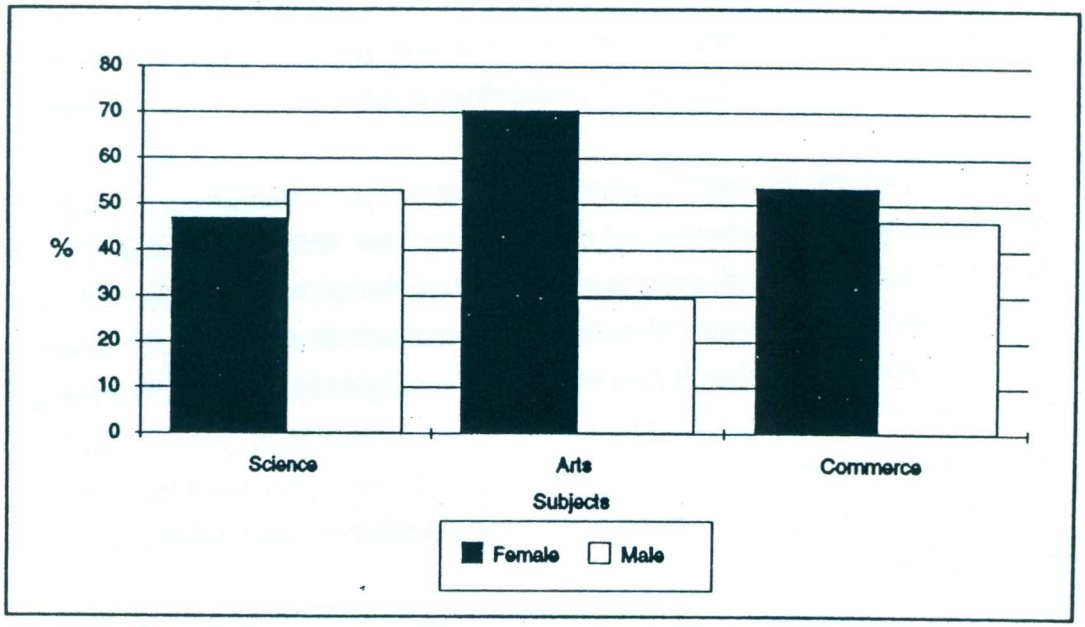
This review of skill development programmes underscores the extent to which the gender division of labour and the ideology of women's work impinge on the structures, content and clientele of skill development programmes.

II. EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In Sri Lanka, general education policies have created a wide base for skill development programmes. Policies that introduced free primary, secondary and tertiary, including university, education over four decades ago, and incentives such as an extensive system of scholarships, free textbooks and midday meals, have promoted the equal access of men and women to general education. There is parity in participation rates in the 5-14 age group (See Appendix Table 1).

Figure 1

Composition of Enrolment in Schools by Subjects, 1987



A higher proportion of women than men is enrolled in secondary and tertiary educational institutions and urban-rural disparities are minimal (Jayaweera,1985). Two factors, however, affect access to skill development -- socio-economic disparities and gender ideology.

Although parental aspirations for the education of their daughters are high because they perceive its economic benefits, economic constraints result in 8% - 10%

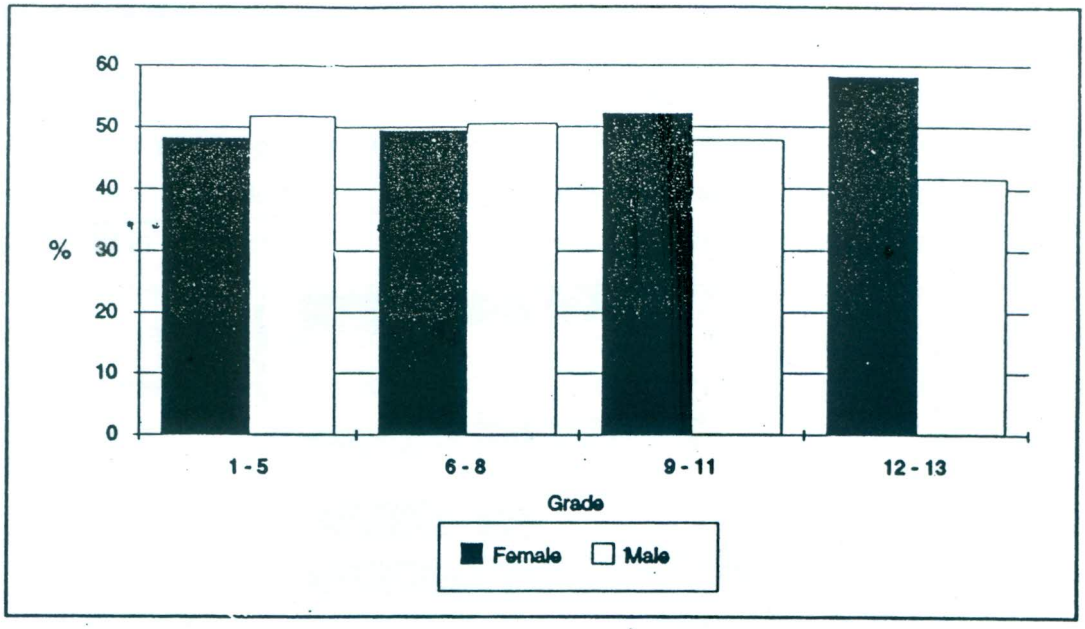
of an age cohort not entering the school system and around 30% dropping out before the completion of primary education and 50% before Grade 9. Studies indicate that these drop-outs belong to low income urban, rural and plantation families (UNICEF-Ministry of Education, 1984, 1985). Women with these low educational attainments are pushed into the informal sector of the economy and have minimal access to vocational training facilities. While secondary school-leavers from middle class families have access to sub-professional training and are able to enter at least middle level jobs, secondary school-leavers from low income families, with or without skill training, are unemployed or are compelled to seek employment as semi-skilled labour in workplaces such as export processing zones, or in non-remunerative small industries. Social class appears, therefore, to be a significant determinant of access to skill development.

In general education, gender role stereotypes reinforced through child rearing, pre-school activities, educational materials and the `hidden' curriculum, and the gender-based diversification of vocational-related subjects have influenced the vocational aspiration of girls, although all girls do not succumb to such cultural conditioning. Boys are channelled to woodwork and metalwork and girls to home economics and weaving. The current Life Skills programme in years 7 and 8 is gender neutral, offering a common curriculum in a range of domestic and elementary vocational skills to boys and girls, but streaming into `masculine' and `feminine' vocational-oriented subjects is enforced from Grade 8.

Likewise, less girls are enrolled in science courses than boys. Even as recently as in 1987, 46.9% of the total enrolment in years 12-13 science classes, 70.5% in arts classes and 53.6% in commerce classes were girls (See Appendix Table 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 2

Composition of Enrolment in Schools by Grades, 1987

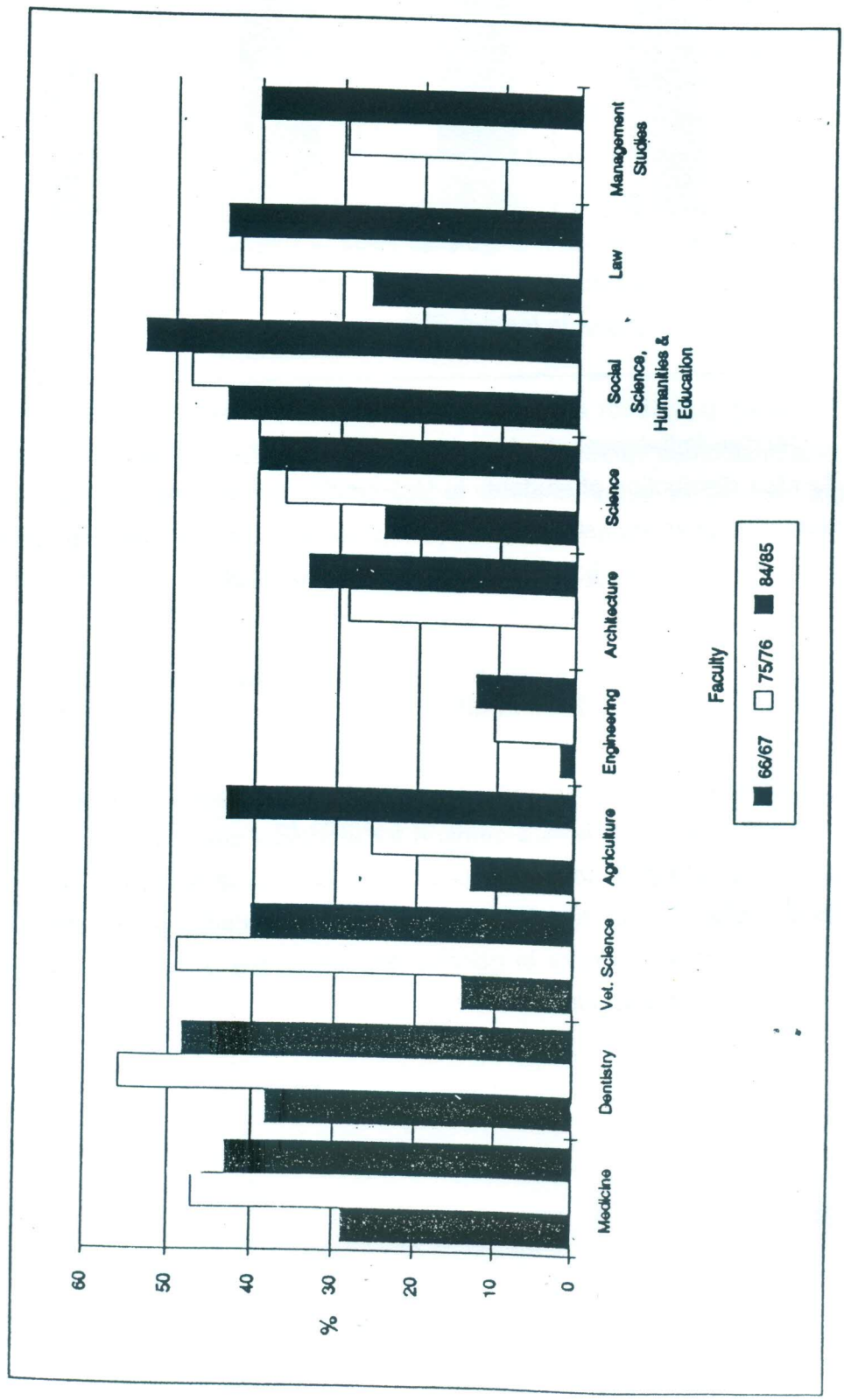


Gender imbalances and gender role stereotypes are reflected also in the Faculty-wise distribution of students in Universities particularly in the continuing under-representation of women students in the engineering, architecture and science faculties (Appendix Table 2), despite improved participation rates.

III. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Vocational education is still one of the less developed sectors of the education system in Sri Lanka. The limited demand for technical and vocational skills generated by the colonial and post-colonial economies, and scarce resources for investment in vocational institutions in recent decades, have militated against the expansion of vocational institutions. Unlike in general education, the gender gap is wide in many vocational education courses.

Figure 3
Proportion of Female University Students in Faculties



Vocational education facilities are hardly adequate to meet the needs of approximately 350,000 who annually complete secondary education or drop out of the formal system of education. A significant proportion of this number seeks employment. Comprehensive enrolment data pertaining to public, non-government and private sector programmes are not available. The survey of technical and vocational education by the Employment and Manpower Division of the Ministry of Plan Implementation in 1986 identified 1993 institutions. Of these, 67% were in the public sector and nearly 40% were located in the Western Province. The majority were small institutions, 60% with a capacity of less than 20 trainees each. These institutions were reported to offer 3343 courses but 61% were less than one year in duration. A tracer study of approximately 500 past trainees revealed that barely 50% of those trained in professional, technical, clerical and production-related jobs had been able to find jobs (MPI Survey, 1986).

This diversity in vocational training programmes is further complicated by the lack of co-ordination in organization and in the content of courses. The Co-ordination Secretariat of Technical and Vocational Training was established in 1982 in the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment but it was not able to achieve its objectives due to lack of acceptance by other agencies (Ratwatte, 1989). In the public sector, currently 19 Ministries are engaged in vocational training, some of them in in-service training for staff development, and others providing vocational training opportunities for young persons. NGOs have largely *ad hoc* programmes and the private sector has specific employment-oriented or on-the-job training programmes.

Recent labour force statistics indicated that 49.6% of those employed in high and middle level professional and technical-related occupations were women (Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey, 1985/86). This equitable proportion, however, hides within it gender imbalances that are reflected in enrolment in training institutions. Around 80%-90% of enrolment in health-related institutions, 60% in Teachers' Colleges and a significant proportion of students in the School of Social Work and in librarianship, accountancy and secretarial programmes are women - all occupations associated with what are perceived to be the 'servicing' roles of women. Around 60% of those undergoing training in the new and burgeoning area of word processing and one-third of those in training courses in computer systems design are reported to be

women (CENWOR, 1989). On the other hand, they are under-represented in agriculture and technical-related courses.

Women have been intensely involved in agricultural production through the ages and they continue to do so in traditional villages and in settlements. Their marginalization as dependent housewives or unpaid family labour is apparent in the low priority given in official policy to training women in agricultural extension and in upgrading their skills as farmers. Of the three Agricultural Schools in the country that cater to the needs of secondary school-leavers, only one -- the Kundasale School -- is open to both men and women, and the intake of women in this institution has been limited to 20% for many years.

Women are represented in the non-formal programmes in District Training Centres and in Young Farmers' Clubs, but these programmes are hardly adequate to increase the economic productivity of women farmers who are major contributors to household income and to the national economy. Agricultural extension programmes often operate through contact farmers' who are usually men. The efficacy of the Farm Women's Agricultural Extension Programme is stymied by the home economics syndrome that limits its activities. Similarly the two Home Development Centres established within the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Scheme, have attempted to domesticate potential women farmers by focusing on their needs as housewives rather than as economic producers. Agricultural training programmes have not been developed to meet the critical need that has surfaced to equip women to cope with agricultural machinery that threatens to displace them from economic activities such as transplanting, harvesting and food processing.

In other Ministries, seven major national training programmes have been organized with an island-wide network of centres. The participation of women in these programmes has increased over the years as the relevant Tables indicate, but this expansion has been largely in the vocational areas that are culturally perceived to be appropriate' for women.

The most institutionalized programme is the one conducted by the Technical Colleges that function under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

There are currently 28 institutions of varying sizes in different parts of the country. Enrolment is around 20.000 and the demand for places is reported to be high. About 40% of the trainees, the majority of whom are employed, are enrolled in part-time courses. The Colleges offer courses at five levels from the Higher National Diploma to short courses for other agencies and for self-employment.

The percentage of women students in these Colleges increased from 14.9% in 1973 to 38.2% in 1986 and declined to 28.3% in 1988 (Table 1). It is interesting to note that while 56.5% of the men students were enrolled in technical courses and 20.4% in commerce courses in 1988, 9.1% of women students were in technical courses and 76.5% in commerce courses. The proportion of women who receive training in skills which are demanded in an increasingly technological environment is therefore minimal and this pattern has prevailed through the years. The only new vocational area into which women have gained entry in large numbers is in draughtsmanship.

Table 1
Enrolment in Technical Colleges

	1973			1987		
	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F
National Dip. in Technology	1,278	99	7.7	136	14	10.3
Technician Certificate	1,369	75	5.5	3,481	479	13.8
Draughtsmanship Certificate	-	-		783	375	47.9
Building Trades	-	-		2,630	147	5.6
Technical Trades	2,400	5	0.2	5,464	42	0.8
Crafts	-	-		56	4	7.1
Tailoring	-	-		64	55	85.9
Home Science	-	-		111	111	100.0
Agriculture	-	-		214	66	30.8
Dip. in Commerce & Accounting	3,199	1,017	31.8	3,193	1,428	44.7
Certificate in Commerce & Business	-	-		4,382	3,051	69.6
English	207	62	29.9	150	82	54.7
Total	8,435	1,258	14.9	20,664	5,854	28.3

Source: Technical Education Division, Ministry of Higher Education

In 1974, the Ministry of Education began a scheme of non-formal Technical Units for school-leavers in an effort to reduce youth unemployment. The units are located in schools, and programmes are conducted in the evenings or during weekends. The objective of the programme is to provide training in `employable' skills to school-leavers and drop-outs in the locality through short practical training schemes of 8 to 10 montns. . Courses are in seven areas – agncu ture, anima .nusoanory, building trades, services (repairs), traditional crafts, small local industries and commerce.

There were 691 units with a total enrolment of 17,668 in 1986. The majority of trainees have been women -- 78.7% of the total enrolment in 1978, 71.3% in 1984 and 69.3% in 1986 (Table 2). The fact that 89.5% of the women trainees were enrolled in dress-making courses in 1986 -- the most recent year for which statistics are available -- reflects the impact of gender role stereotypes on training and employment and the response to the demand for low-cost female labour by Transnational Corporations and local entrepreneurs for the garment industries that were established in the late seventies and early eighties. A tracer study in 1985, however, points to oversupply, as only around 30% of trainees in these units were in wage or self-employment. (Ariyadasa, 1985)

A similar situation appears to obtain in other training programmes that have a national network. The Vocational Centres of the Department of Labour have been in operation for nearly four decades and have catered to school dropouts with Grade 5-8 attainment. The percentage of women trainees increased from 5.9% in 1973 to 29.2% in 1977 and 77.3% in 1982 and declined to 56.4% in 1987 (Table 3). Skill training opportunities for women have not been diversified, however, from mobile dress-making centres organized in the early years. In 1987, 99.8% of the women trainees were enrolled in industrial sewing and garment sewing courses in the `Mobile Training Centres that provide nine months' training in tailoring, carpentry and masonry. Only four women were enrolled in the Skills Development Centre in Orugodawatte that caters to the needs of modern industry. The eight District Skill Development Centres established since 1981 to provide one year's training in relevant skills have no women trainees. The only innovation has been the organization a few years ago of a masonry training course for 20 women trainees in the Kurunegala district. A follow-up report stated that

these women had found employment in the construction sites of the District Vocational Centre and the Model Village in the neighbourhood and that they planned to be self-employed (Fernando, 1984).

Table 2
Enrolment in Non-formal Education - Technical Education Units

Course	Total	1978-Female	% Female	Total	1986-Female	% Female
Motor Mechanism	152	-	-	761	-	-
Air-Conditioning & Refrigerating	-	-	-	34	-	-
T.V., Radio Mechanics	564	10	1.8	823	82	9.9
Electrical Wiring Repairs	89	-	-	1303	39	2.9
Lathe Work, Welding	-	-	-	547	-	-
Watch Repairs	15	-	-	17	02	11.8
Photography	-	-	-	19	02	10.5
Building Trades	-	-	-	165	21	12.7
Draughtsmanship	-	-	-	204	108	52.9
Wood Work / Metal Work	74	-	-	-	-	-
Gem Cutting	-	-	-	94	16	17.02
Painting	-	-	-	70	03	4.3
Carpentry	55	-	-	968	-	-
Masonry	36	-	-	101	03	2.9
Coir Industry	-	-	-	42	33	78.6
Reed & Hana Industry	-	-	-	110	103	93.6
Tailoring	2003	1909	95.3	48	07	14.6
Dress Making	-	-	-	9497	9497	100.0
Industrial Sewing	-	-	-	217	217	100.0
Embroidery / Lace Work	-	-	-	1243	1243	100.0
Batik Printing	903	818	90.6	-	-	-
Making Nets	-	-	-	14	14	100.0
	79	30	37.9	40	38	95.0
Handicrafts	1950	1807	92.7	145	128	88.3
Agriculture	102	65	81.5	30	07	23.3
	-	-	-	21	18	85.7
Animal Husbandry / Bee Keeping	87	15	17.2	19	08	42.1
Home Sc / Cookery	500	500	100.0	17	17	100.0
Hotel Trade	-	-	-	224	31	13.8
Beauty Culture	60	60	100.0	26	26	100.0
Stenography	501	426	85.0	855	584	68.3
Business Administration	65	53	81.5	-	-	-
Total	7235	5693	78.7	17668	12244	69.3

Source : Non-formal Education Unit, Ministry of Education

Table 3
Vocational Training Centres, Department of Labour

Courses	Total	1977 Female	% F	Total	1982 Female	% F	Total	1987 Female	% F
Mechanics	432	-	-	490	3	0.6	487	4	0.8
Electrical	-	-	-	-	-	-	43	-	-
Tractor Repairs	-	-	-	143	-	-	175	-	-
Boat Repairs	30	-	-	29	-	-	19	-	-
Metal Work	-	-	-	-	-	-	162	-	-
Construction & Water Supply	-	-	-	-	-	-	225	-	-
Industrial Sewing	-	-	-	9459	9459	100.0	1175	1175	100.0
Sewing	960	816	85.0	3946	3836	97.2	3200	3200	100.0
Reed/Mat Weaving	16	16	100.0	100	100	100.0	-	-	-
Carpentry	624	-	-	1175	20	1.1	1020	-	-
Masonry	624	-	-	1445	20	1.4	1060	-	-
Hair Dressing	160	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Agriculture	-	-	-	20	20	100.0	-	-	-
Total	2846	832	29.2	17407	13458	77.3	7766	4379	56.4

Source : Department of Labour

The chief national training agency for industry is the National Apprenticeship Board (NAB) which is presently under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. The NAB established in 1971 has implemented schemes of apprenticeship training at different levels of skill development -- technician, and sub-technician for the GCE (OL) qualified, craft-level courses for secondary school drop-outs and village-based artisan training for primary school-leavers. Enrolment is around 12,000 trainees and the intake was 4633 in 1987.

The percentage of women apprentices was minimal in the seventies -- 2.6% in 1973 and 5.7% in 1978 -- increasing to 23.6% in 1983 and 36.9% in 1987 (Table 4). This increase, however, is not a consequence of diversification or the entry of women into new areas in significant numbers, but expansion in the provision of places in textile and garment manufacture and in clerical skills. In 1987, 88% of the apprentices in the textile and garment trades, and 89% in clerical courses were women but there were

only 20.9% in technical trades. Of female urban craft apprentices, 83.5%, and of female village apprentices, 79.2% were in clerical, textile and garment trades. In the mid-seventies efforts were made to enrol a few women at least in non-traditional vocational areas such as radio mechanics, typewriter repairs and printing. While more women are in trades such as printing now, industrial sewing and secretarial work appear to have overshadowed other programmes in the eighties. A few women are enrolled in the new Apprenticeship Training Institute at Katubedde which provides a three-year course for craft apprentices in electrical and building trades and woodwork.

The only follow-up study available pertains to the village-level apprenticeship programme from 1980 to 1985. Of these apprentices, 74.4% are reported to have found employment (Department of Labour and ILO, 1986). The NAB's operations are influenced by employers' perceptions and preferences, which appear to hamper the extension of a wider range of opportunities to women.

Another organization under the same Ministry is the National Youth Services Council established in 1967 to cater to the needs of youth. Its programmes encompass community participation and services, sports, cultural activities and training for leadership and -- in the context of the high incidence of youth unemployment -- vocational training and small entrepreneurship programmes. The 13 Regional Centres offer training programmes, ranging from 3 months to 2 years, in 12 vocational areas identified according to local demand, to youth with 5 to 9 years of educational attainment, and a gender differentiated three months' `women's programme'. Mobile Centres offer short-term flexible programmes including the women's programme.

Table 4
National Apprenticeship Board

Level and Trades	1981						1987					
	URBAN			RURAL			URBAN			RURAL		
	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F
1. Technicians	534	67	12.5	-	-	-	557	116	20.8	-	-	-
2. Construction Supervisors	113	2	1.8	-	-	-	179	33	18.4	-	-	-
3. Craft Apprentices	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(a) Agriculture Sector & Fishermen	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	28	7	25.0
(b) Industries Sector	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(i) Textile Garments	1076	1029	95.6	4	3	75.0	315	276	87.6	550	487	88.5
(ii) Footware	32	12	37.5	-	-	-	45	13	28.9	11	10	90.9
(iii) Wood Work	239	-	-	114	-	-	158	-	-	148	18	12.2
(iv) Printing	136	15	11.02	22	15	68.2	210	112	53.3	62	25	40.3
(v) Rubber, Plastic Goods	34	-	-	8	5	62.2	19	2	10.5	5	4	80.0
(vi) Metal Industries	566	9	1.6	52	1	1.9	759	4	0.5	280	11	3.9
(vii) Machinery , Equipment	1281	83	6.5	60	8	13.3	953	17	1.8	208	6	2,9
(viii) Electrical, Electronic Trades	236	6	2.5	12	-	-	364	8	2.2	111	2	1.8
(ix) Gems & Jewellery	23	14	60.9	2	-	-	19	18	94.7	6	2	33.3
(x) Photography	3	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-
(xi) Construction	116	3	2.6	19	-	-	70	-	-	4	-	-
(c) Service Sector	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(i) Clerical	487	382	83.6	4	-	-	1269	1129	88.9	99	89	89.9
(ii) Hotel Trades	237	4	1.7	-	-	-	149	7	4.7	7	5	71.4
(iii) Domestic Service	270	48	17.8	6	5	83.3	249	7	30.9	116	89	76.7
Total (Craft)	4709	1605	34.1	403	37	9.2	4593	1663	36.2	1635	755	46.2
Grand Total	5759	1711	29.7	-	-	-	6964	2567	36.9	-	-	-

Source: National Apprenticeship Board, Statistics Division

The women's programme offers industrial sewing, dress-making, batik, macrame, bamboo, cane and reed work and household management. It has a substantial enrolment of 40.1% of the total enrolment, reflecting a high degree of participation by women. The only other courses in which women are participants are agriculture (56.7%) in the rural environment and gem cutting (38.6%) (Table 5). The

dichotomy between the women's programme and other courses, and the norms of domesticity that underlie it, contribute to reinforcing the gender role stereotypes and gender division of labour, and limits the development of individual potential.

Table 5
Enrolment in National Youth Council Centres (1987)

Courses	Total	Female	% Female
Motor Mechanics	00	-	-
Electrical Work	94	--	-
Tractor Maintenance	35	-	-
Bicycle Repairs	47	-	-
Welding	54	-	-
Carpentry, Woodwork	150	-	-
Lacquer Work	15	-	-
Metal Work	26	-	-
Masonry	74	-	-
Gem Cutting	101	39	38.6
Agriculture	155	85	56.7
Sewing	33	33	100
Women's Programmes e.g. Batik, Sewing	523	523	100
Driving	30	-	-
Total	1377	680	49.4

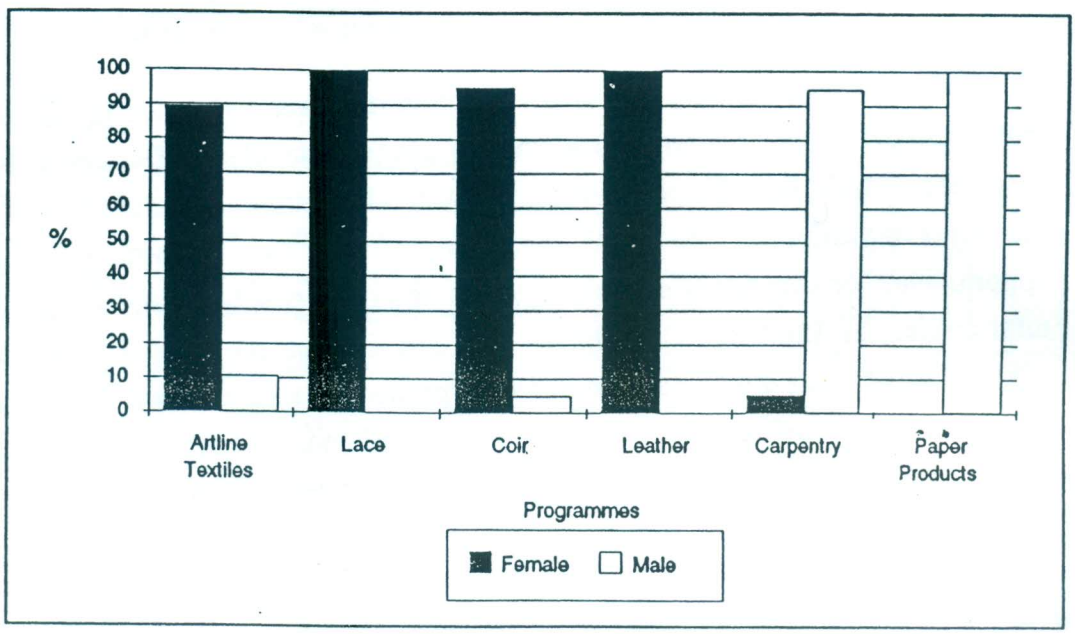
Source: National Youth Services' Council, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment.

The traditional involvement of women in domestic industries is underscored in their extensive participation in the training programme of the Department of Small Industries, which has an island-wide network of centres. These centres organize training-cum-production in small local industries, thus providing skill training opportunities for secondary school drop-outs and primary school-leavers, particularly in rural areas. In 1987, the Department had 316 Centres providing 6 months' training followed by at least 6 months of supervised production in artline textiles, carpets, coir, ceramics, brassware, leather work, lace, cane, hand-made paper and light engineering. Handicrafts are the responsibility of the Sri Lanka Handicrafts Board which works through Master Craftsmen.

The percentage of women trainees was 72.8% in 1978 and 60.6% in 1987 (Appendix Table 3). These industries, however, have been traditionally gender differentiated. Women have been concentrated in textiles, coir, reedware, sewing and lace industries and men in woodwork, carpentry, lacquer work and brassware. Both women and men are engaged in the production of bamboo and cane products and in ceramics.

Currently, women are involved chiefly in the Artline Textile industry, a survivor of the handloom industry, which virtually collapsed with the liberalization of the economy in 1978, and in coir, in which the drudgery of women's work has yet to be relieved by appropriate techniques of mechanization that will not marginalize women. While some centres have been linked with export markets and are thus providing high quality and marketable products, the Centres in general appear to be the refuge of women who have no alternative avenues of employment.

Figure 4
Trainees in Department of Small Industries, 1987



Analogous to these centres are the Rural Development Centres which were established over two decades ago to train women in needlework and dress-making, and were converted to Women's Development Centres in the mid-seventies. The change in nomenclature appears to have done little to improve their appeal or their economic viability. An evaluation of the Centres in the seventies revealed that they generated little income. (Dias, 1978) Their situation has not changed since then and they continue to provide instruction in sewing to economically disadvantaged women with no alternative opportunities. Some of the Centres have fallen into disuse and have been taken over by other organizations.

The Textile Training Centres of the Department of Textiles are the successors of the old handloom and powerloom weaving centres that closed down in the wake of the liberalization of imports and the increased production of synthetic textiles. (Atukorale, 1986) The twenty-four Textile Centres providing a two-year structured training, and around 300 Janasalu Centres engaged in supervised production, are a near monopoly of women. Despite the establishment of a National Design Centre, they have not achieved significant success as yet in reviving the rural textile industry, as incomes of producers are low in the context of a competitive open economy.

The most recently organized national training programme was the World Bank funded Construction Industry Training Project (CITB) initiated in 1982 by the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction to meet the demand for construction-related skills generated by the construction boom and development programmes, such as the Mahaweli and the National Housing Development Programme. In 1986, a second World Bank funded programme was introduced, viz. the Institute for Construction, Training and Development Programme (ICTAD). These programmes are geared to three levels of training -- artisan training in carpentry, masonry, electrical wiring, plumbing, steel fixing and bar bending, construction supervisory training and construction equipment operators.

Between 1981 and 1986, 25,599 have been trained under this programme and only 330 or 1.3% have been women (Table 6). Thirteen percent of the construction supervisors were women. In terms of numbers they compare relatively favourably with women in non-traditional activities in other programmes, but as in this programme,

competitive labour market. One had found employment in a subcontracting enterprise, painting wooden toys and earning Rs.350 to Rs.400 a month. Another undertook a few sewing orders but could barely generate an income, and the third had failed to find a job and was hoping to join a sewing venture in a neighbouring house. The fourth had followed a course in accountancy as an alternative avenue and was seeking a job in this field. The fifth was aspiring to employment overseas. There was consensus that self-employment in sewing was problematic as it entailed capital investment in acquiring a sewing machine and successful identification of markets.

Both sewing groups claimed that their training had contributed to cost saving -- as they were able to meet domestic needs -- but not to employment. It is likely that this market that had reached peak demand in the early eighties is now shrinking with increasing protectionism. It is significant too that their experience is consonant with that of many other young women who are wont to enrol in one programme after another in a desperate search for employment.

The National Apprenticeship Board programmes have an inbuilt advantage in that they are linked with placement in establishments which could absorb some of the trainees in their workforce. Programmes that are provided for their gender appropriateness alone, however, lead to wastage in human resources and skills. The five Batik apprentices, all with the GCE Ordinary Level qualification, were trained in Batik establishments but all were unemployed. In fact, it was their contention that most trainees in that industry were involuntarily employed as the debacle of the tourist industry in a situation of political unrest limited its market potential. One of them had found work as an accounts clerk in the office in which her father worked, and another from a low-income urban family was getting ready to leave for the Middle East for service as a housemaid. Self-employment, they claimed, was doomed to failure without access to capital, space for economic activities, and markets; and the three apprentices who were frustrated without an opportunity to earn their livelihood, were prepared to accept any job.

Women trained in the centres of the Department of Small Industries have the opportunity to continue to work in the centres after training. The five women who were interviewed came from resourceless rural families and were school drop-outs with

Grades 5 to 8 attainment. The two coir workers had been in the centres since their inception in 1979, producing coir rugs and ornaments. The two women in the Artline Textile Centres had joined the handloom centres in their heyday in the sixties, had moved to different localities after marriage, and then joined the Artline Textile Centres in the early eighties. The fifth woman had worked in a leather-work centre for over ten years producing handbags and purses, and had left it just before its closure in 1988.

While these training programmes were linked with production, they had not led to generating an adequate income. The women from all three centres agreed that piece-rate payments were not commensurate with the time and labour expended in production. The quantum and regularity of work depended on orders from the Department and incomes could therefore vary from Rs.100 in a slack month to Rs.600 in a busy month. There was strong resentment of their continuing status as casual workers over a period of at least 10 years. They contended that not one woman in their Centres, not even those with secondary school qualifications and long years of service from the inception of the Centres, had achieved permanency and stability in their economic activities. They were outside the purview of labour legislation and had no access to leave and other benefits enjoyed by workers in large establishments in the public and private sectors.

One of the women had applied for a job as a labourer in the Department to achieve stability, and two others had left recently, one to join a sewing establishment and the other to work in a subcontracting industry in the neighbourhood. The number of trainees and producers in the Centres had declined over the years as these women sought alternative avenues of employment. The Leatherwork Centre was closed down a few months ago as the number of women had declined from 35 to 2.

It was apparent that these Centres, which have a key role in rural industries, were the refuge of those who had no other options. The experiences of these women are no different from those of women interviewed in similar centres in 1978 (Jayaweera and Perera, 1979) and in 1987 (UNIDO-CENWOR, 1987), indicating that conditions in general have not improved over the years, so that rural training programmes have yet to be revamped on a large scale to increase the access to skill development and employment, for women.

V. SPECIAL WOMEN'S PROGRAMMES

Special women's programmes are an outcome of International Women's Year and the UN Decade for Women, when internationally sponsored models of income-generating projects to 'integrate women in development' were proliferated in the Third World by national agencies such as the Women's Bureaux, by NGOs and particularly by women's organizations and by funding agencies. The Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka had a wide network of such projects in villages, settlements, plantations, fishing communities and low-income urban neighbourhoods. In 1985, 6623 women were engaged in economic activities, half of them in animal husbandry and others in agriculture, food processing, sewing and handicrafts. A few innovative projects in masonry and book-binding could not be sustained.

Similar programmes have been implemented by NGOs such as Sarvodaya and by women's organizations at national and community level. They have been largely ad hoc in planning and implementation as NGOs in low-income countries are necessarily dependent on external resources. Some of the more innovative projects have been the hand-pump manufacture and maintenance programme, and the masonry and carpentry projects of a few NGOs.

Special women's programmes have a major weakness in that their training component has been weak and superficial. They have been too brief, ad hoc and lacking in intensity and professionalism to be effective. These programmes have also suffered from their isolation from mainstream development programmes and consequent lack of infrastructural support and their limited outreach. Some of these projects have been conceptualized as training and employment opportunities for secondary earners and have therefore not met the needs of resourceless women who are primary income earners and who need upgrading in skills and technology in order to achieve viability. (Sjkonberg, 1982, Jayaweera, 1985 b)

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VI. CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

This overview of the extent and nature of the participation of women in skill development programmes has surfaced trends and consequences that have implications for the situation of women as economic producers.

It is apparent that with the exception of the Technical Colleges, NAB programmes such as the Apprenticeship Training Institute, and the ICTAD project, which receive assistance from external funding, other training programmes tend to suffer on the whole from lack of resources and low priority, reflected in their poor physical facilities and in the absence of adequate monitoring mechanisms. A major problem appears to be the lack of a uniform system of certification at different levels of proficiency that would assist in enforcing national standards in skill development.

While no legal barriers to the entry of women to programmes exist, women appear quantitatively and qualitatively to be particularly disadvantaged with respect to skill development. The enrolment data presented indicate that women tend to enrol in programmes that lead to culturally demarcated 'feminine' areas of employment, as a consequence largely of their socialization. Some programmes such as the Mahaweli Home Development Centres and the NYSC women's programme create a dichotomy between social and economic development and reinforce gender role stereotypes despite the unreality of such norms in an environment in which women are active participants in economically productive activities. The attitudes of employers who liaise with the NAB programme are further illustrations of perceptions that are cultural lags in a changing society.

In consequence, there is clearly under-utilization of even the existing capacity of training institutions to equip women with useful vocational skills. In 1987, 92% of women trainees in major state industry-related training programmes were found to be enrolled in textile and garment-related courses (UNIDO-CENWOR, 1987). The Sri Lanka scenario is not unique as wide gender imbalances and lacunae in skill development programmes are seen in many economically developing countries as well as in industrialized countries (e.g. Hasan, 1985). Such disparities have adverse

implications for the employment opportunities of women, particularly in poverty groups in low-income countries.

The few tracer studies that are available have pointed in general to unemployment or under-employment among a significant proportion of women trained by some of these programmes. It should be noted that the unemployment rates of women have been double those of men since the early seventies (Census 1971, 1981; Consumer Finances and Socio-economic Survey 1973, 1978/79, 1981/82). Women have access to education but as a result partly of the hiatus in skill training, female school-leavers are more adversely affected than men. In 1981, 14.5% men and 42.0% women with GCE (OL) qualifications and 22.0% men and 52.2% women with GCE (AL) qualifications were unemployed. (Census 1981/82)

In the absence of any planning in skill training it is apparent that training programmes have responded to the demands generated by immediate policy imperatives. Training in industrial sewing has proliferated in most programmes in response to the demands created by the international division of labour and relocation of labour-intensive industries within and outside the Export Processing Zones. The rationale for this expansion has been to provide cheap, semi-skilled and dispensable labour of `secondary earners' to transnational and local entrepreneurs. This demand for low-cost labour has reinforced the concentration of women in semi-skilled occupations and has contributed to the `feminization' of several labour-intensive industries. Local industries, such as the handloom industry, collapsed with the liberalization of imports in 1978 and many training programmes of the Department of Small Industries and other agencies succumbed to these pressures, as a result of which many women lost their livelihood.

The expanding construction industry used women in unskilled and physically taxing manual labour, but the massive training programmes they generated did not take into account the need for upgrading and diversifying the skills of women construction workers. Women in agriculture and in home-based industries have been overlooked in vocational training programmes as they are largely unrecognized, invisible and uncounted in labour-force statistics.

VII. SOME POLICY ISSUES

Viewed from both macro and micro perspectives, skill development programmes therefore appear to have, by and large, reinforced the existing gender division of labour, delayed the access of women to technical know-how and thereby to skilled technical and technological employment and to upward mobility, and continued to `integrate women in development' on unequal terms. Class and gender are seen to interact to limit opportunity and to perpetuate poverty. The experience of the women in the centres described earlier is a far cry from that of professional women and of the successful women entrepreneurs in the city, whose resources and skills have enabled them to make use of incentives for private enterprise.

The narrow range of skills to which women have access continues to be determined by the gender role assumptions of policy-makers. Gender policies therefore threaten to confine women to semi-skilled, casual work in factories and subcontracting industries; to displace them through mechanization; and to marginalize them in a future scenario affected by industrial restructuring and technological progress.

VIII. ISSUES THAT HAVE SURFACED FROM THIS REVIEW ARE OF CONCERN TO POLICY-MAKERS

1. The educational system, as an agent of socialization, needs to motivate and prepare young women to seek access to a wider range of skills on the basis of aptitude and not gender. Pre-schools and primary schools should introduce cross-gender activities that counter negative stereotypes. While there is no justification for vocationalizing secondary schools (Foster, 1965), a common programme developed from the present Life Skills Project could be a better basis for both girls and boys to make their vocational choices. A lacuna in the educational programme today is the absence of a programme of vocational guidance that will make girls more aware of alternative opportunities and improve their self-perceptions.

2. 'Managers' of national vocational training programmes should adopt a more positive approach by introducing advocacy programmes, perhaps with the assistance of

women's groups, in order to motivate more women to seek entry to "non-traditional" programmes, and by eliminating gender-based differentiation in courses that limit access of women to a wider range of training programmes.

Unless there is a greater awareness of the multi-faceted needs of women, the vocational training in agriculture and industry would fail to prevent their continued domestication. Such training programmes, as presently designed, merely re-inforce gender-role stereo-types. National agencies could also play a more positive and catalytic role by persuading employers to recruit more women trainees in technical-related fields and by resuscitating rural industries. The quality and relevance of training programmes could be improved by better resource allocation, monitoring and national certification. The most acute need for infrastructural support is in the programmes which have second-class status outside the ambit of the formal system.

3. In view of the rising educational levels of the female labour-force and the national need for industrial restructuring, it is necessary to facilitate female access to vocational training programmes geared to skill-intensive and 'high tech' industries so that they may not be marginalized in the process of industrial development.

4. Training for self-employment, whether by national agencies or non-governmental organizations, has to be complemented by support services such as access to credit, technology, skills, extension services, managerial skills and markets, if economic viability is to be achieved by segments of the population who are most in need of generating an adequate income. It is necessary for NGOs and other agencies to strengthen the skill component in these programmes by utilizing the country-wide facilities of national agencies. NGOs are also useful in initialing innovative training programmes that can then be implemented widely through national skill development programmes.

5. Conscientization programmes are necessary not only to motivate women to utilize training opportunities, but also to make policy-makers and administrators aware of the multiple roles of women and to sensitize them to the economic needs of women who are often primary income earners and contribute significantly to family survival and maintenance.

While profit-oriented employers will always seek to reduce production costs through the utilization of a cheap unskilled and dispensable female labour-force, it should be the function of the state and women's organizations to ensure that women are equipped with skills to meet changing needs, and have access to work in an environment that is consonant with principles of equity and human dignity.

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Appendix

Appendix Table 1
Enrolment in Schools (1987)

Year	Total No.	No. of Females	% Female
1 - 5	1,993,994	961,974	48.2
6 - 8	877,453	434,145	49.5
9 - 11	796,950	416,064	52.2
Sub-Total	3,668,397	1,812,183	49.4
12 - 13			
Science	55,094	25,856	46.9
Arts	67,441	47,519	70.5
Commerce	42,227	22,636	53.6
Sub-Total	164,762	96,011	58.3
Total 1- 13	3,833,159	1,908,194	49.8

Source : Annual School Census, Statistics Division, Ministry of Education.

Appendix Table 2
Distribution of University Students, Faculty and Sex

Faculties	1966/67 Total enrolment	% Female	1975/76 Total enrolment	% Female	1984/85 Total enrolment	% Female
Medicine	1,542	28.9	1,239	47.1	2,193	43.1
Dentistry	94	38.3	193	55.9	225	48.4
Vet. Science	70	14.3	108	49.1	134	40.3
Agriculture	83	13.3	390	25.6	726	43.4
Engineering	571	1.9	1,210	10.4	1,702	12.8
Architecture	25	-	73	28.8	89	33.7
Science	802	24.6	1,797	36.7	3,018	39.8
Social-Science, Humanities & Education	10,902	43.8	6,605	48.1	6.346	53.5
Law	72	26.4	144	42.4	392	43.9
Management Studies	-	-	889	29.6	3,392	40.2
Total	14,161	38.9	12,648	40.7	18,217	42.8

Source : Report of the National Council of Higher Education, University of Sri Lanka and the University Grants Commission.

Appendix Table 3
Trainees in Department of Small Industries; Centres (1987)

Programmes	Total	Female	% Female
Artline Textiles	1708	1698	89.4
Lace	176	176	100.0
Coir	1007	958	95.1
Leather	60	60	100.0
Carpentry	1979	108	5.4
Paper Products	23	-	-
Total	4953	3000	60.6

Source: Dept. of Small Industries, Colombo.