UNDP Newsletter for South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Human Development

Special issue on gender equality and women’s empowerment

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It is my pleasure to share with you the fifth issue of the South-South Quarterly, the first newsletter to be devoted solely to UNDP initiatives that leverage South-South and Triangular Cooperation to drive gender equality and women’s empowerment.

This issue features diverse initiatives that reflect the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment to UNDP’s work and the achievement of inclusive, sustainable development. These initiatives show how UNDP brings together expertise, experiences and best practices from different countries and regions to address discriminatory attitudes and practices; close gender equality gaps in the workplace; improve women’s political participation; and mitigate the impacts of climate change on poor, rural women.

The women’s movements that have been fueling change throughout the world for decades have been nurtured by cooperation and exchange among women in different communities and nations. In today’s increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, this exchange has become ever more vital in the promotion of gender equality. I am pleased to see that the creative solutions that UNDP is supporting to drive equality and women’s empowerment are traveling far beyond the communities where they originated and are being shared with other groups to drive progress in all contexts and at all levels.

Marking the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation earlier this year, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that South-South and Triangular Cooperation could play a key role in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This newsletter demonstrates that gender equality, which is central to the 2030 Agenda, can also be advanced through South-South exchange and Triangular Cooperation.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, and that it will inspire you to take advantage of the power of South-South and Triangular Cooperation to improve UNDP’s efforts to promote gender equality and achieve sustainable development.

Randi Davis
Director, UNDP Gender Team
With women accounting for 31.6 percent of parliament and 18 percent of local assemblies, Algeria stands at the forefront of women’s political representation in the Middle East and North Africa. From 14-15 June 2015, the Algerian Assembly, with the support of UNDP and UN Women, organized an International Conference of Women Parliamentarians which brought together over 100 women parliamentarians from Algeria, Brazil, Egypt, Finland, Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, Spain and Tunisia to exchange best practices in promoting women’s political participation. Their discussions focused on how to make women members of parliament more effective, including in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in the work of their assemblies. The parliamentarians from Senegal, Rwanda, Jordan and Indonesia particularly emphasized that their women parliamentary networks were able to succeed because they convened women members across parties around common national gender priorities, which enabled them to break political barriers. Algerian MPs shared the positive outcomes of their country’s quota system that was implemented through political parties and which culminated in women making up a third of parliament. The outcome of this meeting in June was the launch of the first ever Algerian Forum of Women Parliamentarians, an informal network which has benefited from the experiences exchanged at the Conference.

The event was integral to the implementation of the 2013 Declaration of Algiers for the sustainable and effective participation of women in politics, also supported by UNDP and UN Women. The declaration calls for the establishment of a national and regional forum of women parliamentarians in Algeria and for South-South exchange of best practices that reinforce the capacities of women parliamentarians and locally elected representatives.

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PALESTINIAN BUSINESSWOMEN PARTICIPATE IN PRODUCTS EXHIBITION IN KUWAIT

Through the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme (DEEP), UNDP facilitated the participation of Palestinian businesswomen in the second Palestinian Products Exhibition in Kuwait. The exhibition helped women entrepreneurs expand their horizons, develop skills and explore innovative ideas to market their products with other countries in the region. Palestinian women engaged with entrepreneurs in Kuwait on strengthening bilateral trade exchanges and introducing Palestinian products to Kuwaiti consumers. The DEEP booth displayed several Palestinian products, ranging from embroidery to drawing on glass, woodcarving, pottery, accessories and jewelry.

DEEP is a poverty reduction programme funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and implemented by UNDP across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. It supports low-income women in achieving economic self-reliance through financial assistance, business development services and coaching to entrepreneurs mainly in Area C, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. The success of the DEEP in Palestine has enabled the model to be scaled up to Somalia, Comoros, Libya and Sudan.

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BAREFOOT COLLEGE: SUPPORTING WOMEN SOLAR ENGINEERS ACROSS AFRICA AND ASIA

A joint initiative between UNDP’s GEF Small Grants Program and the Barefoot College of India is supporting “women solar engineer” projects across Africa and Asia that empower poor women by training them to build, install and maintain solar technologies. Since its launch in 2008, this initiative has supported more than 71 solar women engineer projects in 18 countries to electrify over 3,778 households and bring light to more than 22,739 beneficiaries.

The initiative is leveraging South-South exchange to address multiple development goals: It is advancing gender equality, economically empowering women and electrifying poor, “off-the-grid” communities with clean, low-cost solar energy.

In this collaborative effort, the GEF Small Grants Program provides communities with technical support and funding for solar panel kits. The Barefoot College, a pioneer in demystifying complex technological processes for illiterate students, offers a six-month training to the women beneficiaries on its campus in Tilonia, India.

Most recently, UNDP in Papua New Guinea sent 12 women to India’s Barefoot College to be trained as village solar engineers, with support from the Kumul Foundation. As a result of such training, a Barefoot College curriculum is being developed to train 300 more women in Papua New Guinea.

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The Nepal earthquake of April 2015 has given rise to a unique South-South cooperation initiative between China and Nepal on improving the livelihoods of ethnic minority women from local communities.

The initiative was started by low-income women entrepreneurs from a remote village in China’s Yunnan province who have been receiving support from UNDP China for four years. UNDP China has been helping develop the women’s entrepreneurship skills with training in business management, marketing and microloan schemes. Hearing about the Nepal earthquake, the women, members of the Yi ethnic minority, wanted to help the victims. After initially planning to send embroidered pieces of Yi textiles to Nepalese women weavers as a sign of solidarity, the Yi women eventually decided on a more ambitious plan: to create a jointly produced collection of artisan products to be auctioned to raise funds for the Nepali earthquake victims.

The funds raised by this unique partnership, supported by Mary Kay, a private cosmetics company, will be used to support those affected by the earthquake on livelihood development. In this way, something that was born out of sincere human solidarity will be able to make a lasting impact.

At the community level, the initiative will enable ethnic minority women to explore solutions to improve their social and economic status, preserve their cultural tradition and identity, and create an exchange platform for mutual learning and support. At the national level, UNDP China and UNDP Nepal will develop best practices to support low-income women entrepreneurs in their efforts to lift themselves out of poverty and empower themselves economically, socially and even politically.

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SOMALIA’S “COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS” FOR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

To help change cultural attitudes and elevate the voices and experiences of women, UNDP Somalia is using a “Community Conversations” methodology pioneered by civil society organizations in Zambia and Senegal. The methodology is being used in Somalia to engage six communities in discussions of social norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

Since the initiative was launched in early 2014, Community Conversations on complex gender issues such as women’s decision-making at the household level, female genital mutilation (FGM) and girl-child education were held by community leaders, community members and civil society organizations. Participants were trained in the methodology by two community-conversations global experts from Zambia and Senegal. UNDP Somalia also learned how the methodology was being used in Zambia to address other social problems, including HIV prevention and response.

The programme has improved Somali women’s knowledge of their rights and has changed attitudes toward female genital mutilation. As one participant in the programme has said, “We have come to understand that FGM is not a good practice and the majority of us have now denounced the practice.”

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UNDP has been supporting the Cairo Regional Center for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA) to empower women and promote their participation in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes through South-South exchange. In 2014, 120 women from 25 African countries participated in workshops on topics such as human trafficking; arms trafficking; gender and human rights in peacekeeping/peacebuilding; conflict and crisis management; peacekeeping operations; and human rights and humanitarian law. Over 200 women from African and Egyptian organizations, including the military and the police, were also trained by the center on border issues, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, crisis management and conflict resolution.

The project, which continues through March 2016, also includes the development of a training curriculum to enhance African capacities in combating extreme ideologies that lead to terrorism. Special emphasis in this regard will be placed on the role of women leaders in their local communities.

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EAST-EAST SHARING BRINGS SOLAR WATER HEATERS TO RURAL TAJIKISTAN

During two training courses in a rural village in Tajikistan, village residents – more than half of whom were women – learned to assemble solar water heaters using locally available materials. The pilot workshops in Jilikul village were organized by UNDP Tajikistan with support from UNDP Croatia, which shared valuable experience installing solar water systems in villages that had been cut off from the electrical grid during the conflicts of the 1990s.

The two workshops were organized in 2014-2015 with financial support from the Government of Japan with the aim of increasing access to clean and affordable energy in rural communities across Tajik-Afghan cross border communities. Every winter, nearly 70 percent of Tajik society experiences extensive electricity shortages; rural households have electricity only one to three hours a day.

The ability to construct their own solar water heaters was invaluable to the women participants, many of whose husbands have gone to Russia as migrant laborers. By building solar heating systems, the women not only secured permanent access to warm water but have relieved themselves both of the labor and health risks of gathering and burning biomass to heat water for their household use.

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To close persistent gender equality gaps in the workplace, UNDP is supporting governments to implement a Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme, which enables governments to recognize private and public companies for meeting specific standards to promote gender equality and empower women. By successfully completing the certification process, companies are awarded a Gender Equality Seal, which officially recognizes their achievement of gender equality in the workplace.

The Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme was pioneered in Latin America with UNDP support and is now available globally. Since its launch in 2007, more than 1,400 public and private companies in Latin America have been certified with the seal. Certified companies cite such benefits as greater efficiency and staff performance, increased employee commitment to the company, improved recruitment and an enhanced public image.

South-South cooperation is a key component of the Gender Equality Seal initiative. UNDP helps companies and governments directly support and learn from their counterparts in other countries. UNDP also convenes regional and national dialogues among governments, the private sector and workers’ organizations to stimulate debate and share best practices on closing gender gaps in the workplace. At the national level, UNDP supports governments to develop policies in areas such as labor market development and integration of gender equality criteria into foreign direct investment.

The Gender Equality Seal Certification Programme builds on international commitments to gender equality as well as the United Nations Global Compact’s Women’s Empowerment Principles.

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